252.8 H35 v.2
Hastings
Children's great
texts of the Bible
Acc. No. 37524

252.8 H35 v.2

Keep Your Card in This Pocket

Books will be issued only on presentation of proper library cards.

Unless labeled otherwise, books may be retained for two weeks. Borrowers finding books marked, defaced or mutilated are expected to report same at library desk; otherwise the last borrower will be held responsible for all imperfections discovered.

The card holder is responsible for all books drawn on this card.

Penalty for over-due books 2c a day plus cost of notices.

Lost cards and change of residence must be reported promptly.

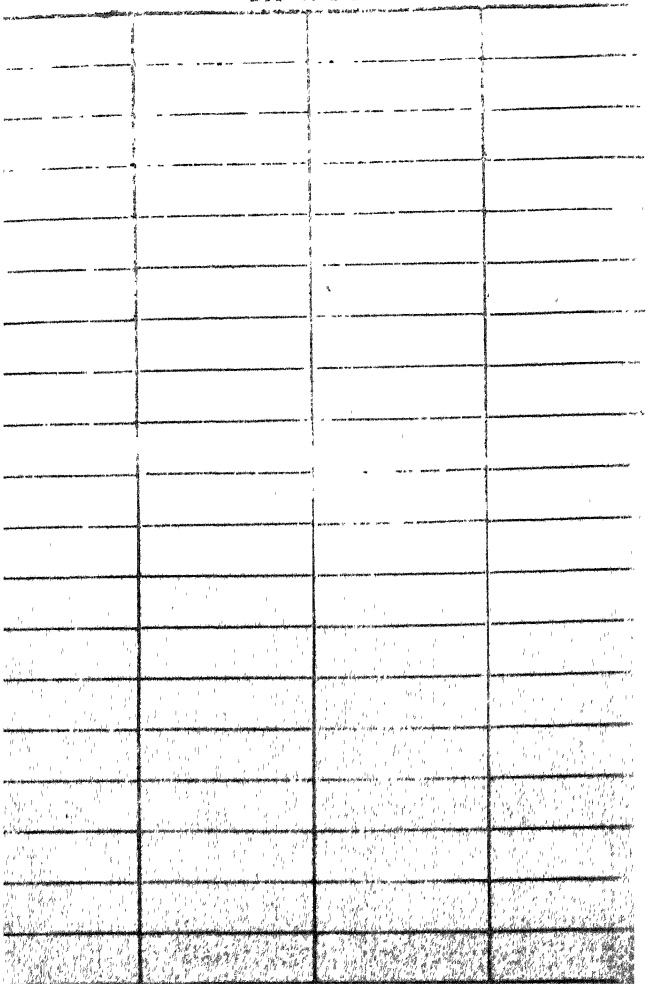
Public Library

Kansas City, Mo.

Keep Your Card in This Pocket

BERKOWITZ ENVELOPE CO., K. C., MO.

KANSAS CITY MO PUBLIC LIBRARY



THE CHILDREN'S GREAT TEXTS OF THE BIBLE

THE CHILDREN'S GREAT TEXTS

Vol. I. GENESIS TO JOSHUA
" II. JUDGES TO JOB
" III. PSALMS TO ISAIAH
" IV. JEREMIAH TO MATTHEW
" V. MARK TO JOHN
" VI. ACTS TO REVELATIONS

THE CHILDREN'S GREAT TEXTS OF THE BIBLE

EDITED BY

JAMES HASTINGS, D.D.
EDITOR OF "THE EXPOSITORY TIMES" "THE DICTIONARY OF THE BIBLE"
"THE ENCYCLOPÆDIA OF RELIGION AND ETHICS"
AND OTHER WORKS

VOLUME II

JUDGES to JOB

NEW YORK
CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS
1920

CONTENTS

	PAGE
God's Suns (Judg. v. 31)	1
Gideon the Brave (Judg. vi. 12)	6
The Fowler's Snare (Judg. viii. 27)	14
The King of the Trees (Judg. ix. 8)	17
A Swarm of Bees (Judg. xiv. 8)	23
Samson (Judg. xvi. 28)	29
Taken by Surprise (Judg. xviii. 7)	35
Gleaners (Ruth ii. 7)	40
Somebody's Noticing (Ruth ii. 11)	46
A Little Coat (1 Sam. ii. 19)	51
The Child-Prophet (1 Sam. ii. 26)	55
The Right Kind of Ears (1 Sam. iii. 10)	58
Inquire Within (1 Sam. xvi. 7)	63
Only a Shepherd Boy (1 Sam. xvi. 11)	68
Five Smooth Stones (1 Sam. xvii. 40)	72
The Friend of David (1 Sam. xviii. 1)	77
Walls (1 Sam. xxv. 16)	82
God's Jewel-Case (1 Sam. xxv. 29)	85
A Fool's Cap (1 Sam. xxvi. 21; 1 Cor. iv. 10)	89
Paying Your Debts (2 Sam. ii. 4)	95
God's Dwelling-Place (2 Sam. vi. 11)	100
A Promise and how it was Kept (1 Sam. xx. 15; 2 Sam. ix. 7)	105
Playing the Man (2 Sam. x. 12)	113
Absalom (2 Sam. xiv. 25)	119
Acting Ferry-Boat (2 Sam. xix. 18)	124

PAGE

THE GREATNESS OF GENTLENESS (2 Sam. xxii. 36) . 129
JEWELS IN THE MUD (2 Sam. xxii. 43) . . . 134
A MORNING WITHOUT CLOUDS (2 Sam. xxiii. 4) . . 138
A PRECIOUS GIFT (2 Sam. xxiii. 16) . . . 142
A THRONE FOR THE KING'S MOTHER (1 Kings ii. 19) . 147
DAY-DREAMS (1 Kings iii. 15) 153
THE TREE OF THE LORD (1 Kings iv. 33) . . . 158
NARROW LIGHTS (1 Kings vi. 4) 162
REHOBOAM THE UNWISE (1 Kings xii. 8) . . . 167
PRETENDING (1 Kings xiv. 6) 173
TRUST AND GET THE BLESSING (1 Kings xvii. 15). . 178
LAME MINDS (1 Kings xviii. 21) 183
LITTLE THINGS (1 Kings xviii. 44) 187
THE LETTER "I" (1 Kings xix. 10). . . . 192
BOASTING (1 Kings xx. 11) 196
BUSYNESS AND BUSINESS (1 Kings xx. 40) . . . 200
CHEATING GOD (1 Kings xxii. 30, 34) . . . 206
THE LITTLE WORD "BUT" (2 Kings v. 1) . . . 212
SOME GREAT THING (2 Kings v. 13) . . . 216
SEEING THE UNSEEN (2 Kings vi. 17) . . . 222
THE KING'S CROWN (2 Kings xi. 12) . . . 226
MONEY-BOXES (2 Kings xii. 9) 230
A "RELIABLE" STORY (2 Kings xii. 15) . . . 236
GOD'S GIFTS AND OURS (1 Chron. xxix. 14) . . 240
THE MAN WHOM NOBODY MISSED (2 Chron. xxi. 20) . 244
THE SECRET OF STRENGTH (2 Chron. xxvii. 6) . . 248
O.H.M.S. (2 Chron. xxx. 6) 252
TWO SAINTS OF GOD (2 Chron. xxxiv. 1, 3) . . 257
YESTERDAY, TO-DAY, TO-MORROW (Ezra iii. 4) . . 264
ABSOLUTELY IT (Ezra vi. 23) 269
THE COLOUR OF VIRTUE (Ezra ix. 6; Jer. vi. 15). . 273
HOW THEY BUILT THE WALLS (Neh. iv. 9, 17) . . 277
A GOOD DAY (Est. ix. 19, 22) 281
A SPIDER'S WEB (Job viii. 14) 285
A LAUGHING-STOCK (Job xii. 4) 289

PAGE
A Driven Leaf (Job xiii. 25) 292
A Prisoner in the Stocks (Job xiii. 27) . . 295
A Moth-Eaten Garment (Job xiii. 28) . . . 300
Removing Rocks (Job xviii. 4) 304
The Topaz (Job xxviii. 19) 307
Seals (Job xxxviii. 14) 312
The Treasures of the Snow (Job xxxviii. 22) . . 315
Who Sends the Rain? (Job xxxviii. 28) . . . 320
Pointers (Job xxxviii. 32) 324
Seeing the King (Job xlii. 5) 328

THE CHILDREN'S GREAT TEXTS.

GOD'S SUNS.

Let them that love him be as the sun when he goeth forth in his might.—Judg. v. 31.

DID you ever try to think of what the world would be like without the sun? As a matter of fact there wouldn't be any world at all, at least not the world as we know it. There would be nothing but a mass of dead matter whirling through space. If it were not for the sun there would be no light, no colour, no heat, no flowers, no grass, no trees, no animals, no human beings, no life at all on the earth.

Now our text is a prayer that those who love God may be "as the sun when he goeth forth in his might." I wonder how that could be? Well it is like this. Those who really and truly love God, love also everything that God loves. And love is just like the sun. It fills the earth with life, and light, and warmth and beauty. Without it the world would be a bad place and a sad place. Without it the world wouldn't be fit to live in.

Will you try to remember three things?

1. Love is like the sun because it brings *light.* And light means gladness and beauty.

Centuries ago there was built in Florence a wonderful palace called the Riccardi Palace. Part of this palace was set apart as a chapel, and a famous artist was engaged to adorn the walls with beautiful frescoes which, as some of you know, are paintings on plaster.

Now there was a curious thing about this chapel—it had no windows. The artist was obliged to paint by the dim light of a lamp. And for many, many years those who came to view the chapel could see the wonderful frescoes only by the same insufficient light. They had to strain their eyes to look at them and even then they could see them but imperfectly.

Then one day a picture was removed from above the altar, and a hole was pierced in the wall behind where it had been. The glorious sunlight streamed in and filled the chapel. It revealed the exquisite frescoes in all their glory, bringing out the marvellous colourings and the perfection of line and shadow.

And, boys and girls, love is just like that, the love of God and man. It fills the earth with joy and beauty. It brings gladness to weary and sad hearts. It shows us beauty in the things we had thought plain, beauty that before was hidden from our eyes.

2. And then love is like the sun because it brings *warmth.* And warmth brings life and comfort.

You know how it is in the springtime, how the

little plants that have been lying sleeping under the frozen ground begin to stir in their sleep when the sun shines brightly and warmly. You know how it is in the summer—how the flower-buds open their cups in response to the warm kiss of the sun. You know how it is in the autumn—how the grain turns ripe and yellow in the golden sunshine.

And love is just like that. It thaws the frozen hearts, it softens the hard ones, it makes the sweet flowers of gentleness and kindness to spring up and blossom, it ripens and mellows the sterner natures.

3. And then love is like the sun because it gives *power*.

You have all heard of George Stephenson, the man who invented the first railway engine. Well, one day Stephenson was standing with a friend—Dr. Buckland—at the side of a railway when a train came rushing past. Stephenson said, "Now Buckland, I have a question to ask. Can you tell me what power is driving that train?" "I suppose it is one of your big engines," replied Buckland. "Yes, yes, but what drives the engine?" said the inventor. Again Buckland answered, "Very likely a driver from Newcastle." Stephenson smiled, "What do you say to the light of the sun doing it?" he asked. And Buckland replied, "How can that be?"

Then Stephenson explained how millions of years ago the plants and trees growing on the earth drank in the rays of the sun, how after they died they were

changed in the course of long ages into coal, how the coal when it burned was just giving out this bottled sunshine which it had drunk in, so that it was in reality the sunshine of long ago that was driving the train along the rails.

And love is a tremendous power too. It can accomplish what nothing else can accomplish.

In a certain school there was a headmaster whom the boys disliked. They thought him hard and severe, and so they made up their minds to annoy him as much as they could. And when boys make up their minds to that you know what they can do! Well, these boys cribbed their exercises, they neglected their studies, they paid as little attention as possible to the master's orders, they never did anything he really wanted, and they strove to do all the things he didn't want.

But one day a boy was very badly hurt in the playground and some of the others ran to fetch the master. He came immediately and he sent one of the boys off at once to bring the doctor. Then he stooped down and lifted the injured boy in his arms, oh, so tenderly! And he spoke to him so softly, and bound up his wounds with such firm, gentle fingers that one of the other boys exclaimed, "Why, he loves us!"

From that day the school was a changed place. The boys had seen their master with new eyes, and now, instead of trying to annoy him, they did their best to please him. They respected him and obeyed his

instructions. It was love that had wrought the miracle.

Boys and girls, the world needs love more than anything else. It is love that is going to make it anew. It is love that will do for it what nothing else will do. God is love, and He sent Jesus to live amongst us and to die for us just to prove that to us. God is love, and wherever there is love there is a bit of God. God is love, and He wants to shed abroad His love on earth through you and through me.

Would you like to be God's suns in the world, bringing light and warmth and power to all? Then you must take your hearts to the great Sun of Righteousness, the Source of all light and love. You must take them to Him and ask Him to shine into them. Then, and then only, you will be able to shine for Him.

GIDEON THE BRAVE.

The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valour.—Judg. vi. 12.

I WONDER how many of you keep a picture gallery of heroes? I don't mean a real gallery of pictures, but one that exists in your mind. I expect most of you have such a gallery, and I think I can guess the names of some of the portraits that are hanging there. There are Raleigh and Drake, Wellington and Nelson, Florence Nightingale and General Gordon, Lord Roberts and Kitchener. Lately you have been adding many new pictures—pictures of the glorious heroes who fought and died in the Great War.

Now it is a good thing to keep a gallery of brave men and women, because if we look at their portraits often enough we shall perhaps grow a little like them. And I want you to find room among your collection for a hero of the olden times—Gideon, the "mighty man of valour."

The thing that I like best about Gideon, and the reason why I have chosen him for one of my heroes, is that he was a man who was afraid. That seems a funny thing to say about a hero, doesn't it? but it is only half the truth. Would you like to know the

whole of it? He was a man who was afraid—and yet went on in spite of his fear. And that was just the reason why he was so brave. For the bravest men or women, the bravest boys or girls, are not those who feel no fear, but those who are afraid and yet make their will conquer their fear.

When we first meet Gideon he is beating out corn with a stick in the winepress for fear of the Midianites. But to understand that we must go back a little.

The Israelites had forgotten the God who had brought their fathers safely into the land of Canaan. They had begun to worship the false gods of the Canaanites. So they had lost hold of the great pure faith in Jehovah which had bound them together in many a hard experience and brought them triumphantly through many a stern battle. As a consequence they had become weak and unnerved and cowardly.

It was then that the Midianites—fierce bands of marauders under their robber chiefs—came up and laid waste the land. When the corn was whitening to the harvest they cut it down, when the grapes were ripening on the vines they carried them away. They carried off sheep and cattle and everything they could lay their hands on. And the terrified Israelites fled before them and took refuge in the dens and caves of the mountains.

Year after year, for seven years, this happened. Then at last the people of Israel cried to God to deliver them. It seems shabby, doesn't it? So long

as they were prosperous they forgot God, but when things began to go wrong they were pleased to remember Him.

And if God were like most of us He would have let them go their own way. But our Father in heaven is forgiving and merciful and loving. He had allowed the Midianites to come up and harass His people because He knew that these fierce robbers would do the Israelites less harm than they would do to themselves by running away from Him. And when the people cried out to Him like hurt children He hastened to their aid as a mother does to the aid of her hurt child. He sent them as a deliverer Gideon, the "mighty man of valour."

So now we understand why Gideon was beating out corn in secret. He had managed to secure a little of his father's crop before the Midianites could steal it. But instead of having it threshed out at the threshing-floor, which was in an exposed place, he was laboriously beating it out in the winepress—a tank or trough hollowed out in the rock where the grapes were trodden.

It was while he was busy with this duty that the angel of the Lord appeared to him and bade him go and save his people from the Midianites. And it was then that Gideon showed the first sign of fear and hesitation. His family was the least in the tribe and he was the youngest son. How could he save Israel? Besides, he wanted to be quite sure that the messenger came from God, quite sure that it was God who was sending him forth. So he asked the angel to remain

just where he was until he should bring him an offering of food. He went home and got ready a kid and some unleavened cakes. And he brought the flesh in a basket and the soup in a vessel. The angel bade him lay the flesh and unleavened cakes upon the rock and pour out the broth. Then he touched the offering with the end of his staff and fire came out of the rock and consumed it.

So Gideon was convinced that it was God Himself who had spoken to him in the person of the angel, and he was ready for any service, no matter how dangerous that service might be.

He had not long to wait. That very night God told him to go and destroy the altar of Baal that his own father had set up, and to erect in its place an altar to Jehovah. Gideon promptly obeyed. He took ten of his servants with him and in the darkness of the night they overthrew the altar of Baal and set up an altar to Jehovah whereon they sacrificed a bullock.

I sometimes think that Gideon was never so brave as when he dared to destroy the altar of Baal. To throw down the sacred symbols of a people's religion is like thrusting your hand into a wasp's nest. And I have often wondered if these ten men who accompanied him formed part of the valiant three hundred who later went with him at dead of night to surprise the camp of the Midianites.

Well, in the morning there was a terrible uproar. Of course the overthrown altar was discovered, and somehow or other it leaked out that Gideon had done

the deed. The followers of Baal wanted to put him to death immediately, but his life was saved by the shrewd council of his father who argued that if Baal were really a god he himself would take revenge upon the destroyer of his altar. Of course nothing happened, and from being a much miscalled person Gideon became a popular hero.

It was just then that the Midianites gathered together a huge army, invaded the land of Israel, and encamped in the valley of Jezreel.

And the Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon and he blew a trumpet and gathered together the men of his own clan. Then he sent messengers throughout his tribe—the tribe of Manasseh—and throughout the tribes of Asher and Zebulun and Naphtali; and he gathered together an army of thirty-two thousand men.

It was then, just when he had got together his army, that Gideon began to be afraid again. This time he wanted to make sure that God would really save Israel by his hand, and again he asked for a sign.

He had with him a sheepskin—perhaps his sheepskin cloak. He laid it down on the threshing-floor in the evening and asked that, if God meant to save Israel by him, the fleece might be wet with dew in the morning and all the ground round it dry. And he rose up early in the morning and found it as he had desired. Then he asked that the miracle might be reversed, and that this time the fleece might be dry, and the ground wet. And so it was.

Then Gideon went forward bravely to his task. And you remember what a task it was. He had thirty-two thousand men, but the Midianites had four times as many, and yet he was told to reduce his army. First of all he was told to send home all the men who were afraid. And twenty-two thousand deserted him. Then God told him to take the remaining men down to a pool of water at the bottom of the hill and test them there. Those who knelt or lay down to drink were to be sent away, and those who remained alert and on guard, merely tossing a little water to their mouths in passing, were to be kept. Of all the ten thousand only three hundred stood the test.

I am not going to tell you the story of the faithful three hundred, because it is splendidly related in the seventh chapter of Judges and you can read it for yourselves; but I want you to notice that before Gideon fell upon the Midianites God gave him a final assurance. He didn't ask for it; he had made up his mind to go forward whatever happened; but I think he must still have been feeling a little nervous. And no wonder! For who would not feel nervous about attacking one hundred and thirty-five thousand men with a feeble band of three hundred?

So God told Gideon to take his servant Phurah and creep down into the Midianite camp at dead of night. There he would hear something that would give him confidence and strength. And when the two scouts reached the camp they heard one soldier relating a dream to another. He told how he had dreamt that a

loaf of barley bread, the coarse fare of the poorest peasants, came tumbling down the hill and fell against the tent. And instead of being stopped by the tent the loaf had knocked the tent over. Then the other soldier replied in terror that the dream meant nothing else than that God had delivered the whole host of Midian into the hands of Gideon.

You know how Gideon went back to his three hundred men strengthened by that story, and how he led them on to complete victory.

One more glimpse we get of Gideon's courage. It is when, at the end of that day's battle, he and his three hundred men come to the Jordan and cross over "faint, yet pursuing." He had the courage to endure as well as to fight, and these words "faint, yet pursuing" have often been taken as a motto of the Christian life.

So, boys and girls, don't be discouraged if you sometimes feel afraid, only be afraid of giving way to your fears.

There is a famous story of a great soldier, Lord Napier of Magdala, which might well stand beside that of Gideon. When, as a young subaltern, he was riding into his first action his face was as pale as death. And a burly soldier who rode beside him and had been through many a fight sneered at him. "Why, you're afraid!" said he. "Yes," replied the other, "I'm horribly afraid; and if you were half as afraid as I am, you'd cut and run!" Don't you think that was a splendid answer?

And one thing more I want you to remember. God is able to make heroes of cowards. That was the message to Gideon—"The Lord is with thee." Gideon would not have been half the man he was if it had not been for his faith in God. And so he was thought fit to take a place among that great gallery of heroes in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews who through faith "out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens."

We began by speaking of picture galleries, and we shall end by speaking of them. I asked you to find room for the portrait of Gideon. Will you find room for one other? It is the portrait of Jesus Christ, the greatest Hero who ever lived. If you keep that likeness always beside you, if you look at it often enough, you will find that, of even the most timid among you, He is able to make a hero like Himself.

THE FOWLER'S SNARE.

It became a snare unto Gideon, and to his house.—Judg. viii. 27.

GIDEON had led the people of Israel in a great battle and led them very successfully. Their enemies had been completely beaten and had fled, leaving a great many dead behind them. The Israelites were so delighted that they begged Gideon to be their king and rule over them, but he refused. But, as a reward for what he had done, he asked them to give him the gold earrings which they had taken from their defeated enemies. And he melted down the gold and made it into an ephod, a kind of image. Probably he did not think he was doing any harm, but rather good, in making a religious image. But the end of it all was that the people of Israel took to worshipping this image and "it became a snare unto Gideon, and to his house," a trap that led them into idolatry.

Snares are often spoken of in the Bible. They were used for catching wild birds and small animals, and are used still. One kind of snare was a net kept open by a stick which sprang out when it was touched and left the bird in the net. Another was a wicker cage, the lid of which was propped open, and fell after the bird

was in. Small birds like sparrows and linnets were caught by spreading sticky stuff, called bird-lime, on the branches of trees. A singing-bird was hung in a cage close by to attract the wild ones. These stuck to the lime and so were easily caught.

In some parts of the world the soul is thought to be a small creature like a bird, which may leave the body, fly away during sleep, and come back when the owner wakens. So in the islands of the South Sea there are sorcerers who believe they can catch the soul. They make snares of strong cord with loops of different sizes to suit the different kinds of souls. There are large loops for fat souls, and small loops for thin souls. These loops are set up near somebody's house, and it is supposed that when the soul leaves the body it may be caught in the snare; and if it is caught, it will be unable to get back, and its owner will die.

Now you cannot catch souls, like birds or butterflies, in a net; yet the soul has its snares and dangers, not made of loops of string, but just as real. If there is anything which the soul loves so much as to prevent it from loving God, that is its snare. It is caught in it like a fluttering bird that cannot soar up to heaven.

Many people have found money a snare. They cared more for money than for goodness. They gave all their hearts to getting more and more money. They could not bear to part with it even to do good, and at last their better self died, like a bird in a snare, and they became mere misers.

Many others have found amusement a snare, the

kind of amusement, that is, that leads into bad company, and neglect of work, and the beginning of bad habits.

Then there is the snare of cowardice, the snare that makes us afraid to do right, because people may laugh at us. And there is the snare of the lips, the snare that catches us speaking words that are spiteful, or untrue, or angry, or profane.

With all these snares around it, how shall the soul escape? The Book of Psalms often speaks of the snares that are all around us, and the enemies that lie in wait, but this is what the Psalmist says about it—"I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress; my God, in whom I trust. For he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler." It is God alone who can save our souls from the net.

THE KING OF THE TREES.

The trees went forth on a time to anoint a king over them.—Judg. ix. 8.

In the middle of the Book of Judges, mixed up with the history of wars and battles, you will find a little story, a fable, one of the oldest fables in the world. It is the story of how the trees wanted a king.

"The trees went forth on a time to anoint a king over them; and they said unto the olive tree, Reign thou over us. But the olive tree said unto them, Should I leave my fatness, wherewith by me they honour God and man, and go to wave to and fro over the trees? And the trees said to the fig tree, Come thou, and reign over us. But the fig tree said unto them, Should I leave my sweetness, and my good fruit, and go to wave to and fro over the trees? And the trees said unto the vine, Come thou, and reign over us. And the vine said unto them, Should I leave my wine, which cheereth God and man, and go to wave to and fro over the trees? Then said all the trees unto the bramble, Come thou, and reign over us. And the bramble said unto the trees, If in truth ye anoint me king over you, then come and put your trust in my shadow: and if not, let fire come out of the bramble, and devour the cedars of Lebanon." "I'm delighted to

accept your invitation," he meant, "I'm just the very person for the place. And if you truly anoint me king over you, then you may all come and take shelter from the hot rays of the sun under my noble spreading boughs. But if you won't have me, if you play me false, then may a spark of fire come out of the bramble and burn up all the cedars of Lebanon."

There are four trees in the story, the olive, the fig, the vine, and the bramble. The olive is the most useful tree, so it got the first offer. It is a large tree with gnarled branches. Its leaves are green above and grey below, which gives them a beautiful appearance. Its wood is very fine. Its berries, called olives, are most useful. They are eaten with bread, or pressed to make olive oil. This oil is used for food, and for lamps. It was used in the lamps in the tabernacle, and mixed with the incense and the offerings; and when a high priest or a king was appointed he was anointed with olive oil. So by the olive they honoured both God and man. No wonder that when the trees came asking the olive to be king it answered that it could not think of leaving all its usefulness, and going to wave about over the trees.

The fig tree was the next one they tried. It had not so many uses as the olive, but it had its sweet fruit for food, and its welcome shade from the sun. Men would miss their figs very much, so the fig tree, too, refused. "How can I leave my sweetness, and my good fruit, and go to wave to and fro over the trees?"

Then there was the vine. You know what the vine

bore—great juicy clusters of grapes for thirsty people. And from these grapes came the wine to cheer their hearts. The vine could not stop giving its grapes and wine to go and wave about over the trees.

Then last of all there was the bramble. But the plant here called the bramble was not the plant which Scottish children call by that name and English children call the "blackberry." It was just a common thorn bush with small leaves and long thorns. Its only use was for fuel, for it got very dry and burned easily. Sometimes in the dry season these thorn bushes would catch fire and the fire would spread to larger trees and destroy them. As for boasting about its shadow and inviting the noble trees to come and take shelter under it, that was a perfectly absurd suggestion from a shrub a few feet high.

Now the olive and the fig and the vine had all refused to be king, because they would rather be useful than powerful, and they were quite content to go on growing their good fruits for the service of God and man. But when the trees asked the bramble, which was of no use at all, it was quite ready to accept the position for which it was altogether unfit.

Will you try to remember two things that this quaint old fable teaches us?

1. It is a greater thing to be of service than to have honours paid to you. The Mikado of Japan used to be so held in honour that he was not allowed to do anything for himself—not even to wash his own face,

or to walk a step, because he was too sacred to set his foot on the earth. But that is a very poor idea of a king. The kingliest king is the one who does most for his people, and the kingliest boy or girl is the one who is readiest to help and serve others.

There was a famous preacher once called Rowland Hill. One day he heard a *terrible* noise going on outside his study door. It might have been his neighbour's cats fighting, but somehow it sounded more human. Well, he opened the door and there he found his two maids quarrelling as to whose duty it was to clean the entrance hall.

He sent them both away to do some errands for him, one in one direction, and the other in another. Then he took the pail and the scrubbing-brush, and when they returned they found him washing the hall.

The girls were horrified. "Oh, sir," they exclaimed, "that's not for you! You mustn't do our work!"

Mr. Hill looked at them, "Well," he said cheerfully "it seems it's not your place Mary, nor yours either Susan. So I expect it must be mine!"

You see those who really love God are glad to do Him any service, however humble that service may be

God, make my life a little light,
Within the world to glow;
A little flame that burneth bright
Wherever I may go.
God, make my life a little flower
That giveth joy to all,
Content to bloom in native power,
Although the place be small.

God, make my life a little song
That comforteth the sad;
That helpeth others to be strong,
And makes the singer glad.
God, make my life a little staff,
Whereon the weak may rest,
That so what strength and health I have
May serve my neighbours best.

2. There is a little kingdom in your heart for which you choose your own king. Whatever it is that you give the first place to, that is your king. Some people let a bad temper do just what it likes in their hearts. Idleness is the best king another can wish. Surely there are better kings to choose than these.

Louis XVI. was the last king of France. The people of France put him to death, but he left behind him a little son who would have been Louis XVII. had the government not been changed. The little prince was kept a prisoner and those who had him in charge tried to make him forget he was a king's son. They endeavoured to fill his mind with bad thoughts, and bad feelings, and bad words. But the boy had a noble nature and he did his best to forget their wicked teaching. When they tempted him very sorely he would turn away from them and say through his tears, "I can't say it. I can't do it. For I was born to be king."

Now, boys and girls, you are all "born to be kings," kings over yourselves. Don't allow bad habits or wicked passions to have dominion over you. If you

must choose a ruler, then let it be usefulness like the olive, and sweetness like the fig, and cheerfulness like the vine. Above all choose love; for he who makes love king over his heart chooses the best of all, because God is love.

A SWARM OF BEES.

A swarm of bees.—Judg. xiv. 8.

HAS it ever occurred to you to wonder what animals think about? Perhaps it never struck you that they thought at all—except possibly about their food and drink. But if you have a pet at home you will know that this is not the case. What is your dog dreaming of as he lies blinking in front of the fire? Is he going over again that grand chase after a rabbit that he had in the days of his giddy youth? Is he wondering where you will take him for to-morrow's walk? What is he thinking of when he puts his two paws on your knees and looks up into your face with his beautiful brown eyes and gives a little whine? He is trying to tell you something, only it is your ears that are deaf and cannot understand his doggy language. What is your kitten thinking of as she chases a paper ball? She is never still one moment and always seems to be inventing some new way to use her toy.

We human beings are so very conceited and stupid that we sometimes talk and act as if we were the only creatures who had brains worth mentioning; and we forget that the great God who made us has created many other creatures very wise and very wonderful, and that He loves and cares for them all.

To-day I want to tell you about one of the most marvellous creatures God has made. It is very tiny—less than an inch in length—and yet it has a very wonderful brain. You have seen it hundreds of times buzzing about the gardens in the sunny summer days, and if it has come too near, you have perhaps run away. Of course that is a mistake, because it won't interfere with you unless you interfere with it. Now I wonder if you can guess who this wonderful creature is? Yes, it is just the little common hive-bee; and when you grow older I hope you will all read a book by Maurice Maeterlinck called "The Life of the Bee"; for it reads just like a fairy tale, and yet it is all true. I shall try to tell you some of the strange things he tells us.

There are three kinds of hive-bees. First there is the queen-bee who reigns over the hive and lays the eggs that will one day turn into grubs and later into new bees. Then there are the worker-bees who do all the hard work of the hive. Lastly there are the drones who are lazy good-for-nothings and of whom we shall have more to say later.

At present I want to talk to you about the worker-bees. They are very clever little creatures and teach human beings many useful lessons.

1. Of course the first thing you think of in connection with a bee is its *industry*. Somehow you can't think of bees without at the same time thinking of "busyness." We speak of "busy bees," and "hives of

industry," and so on. And when you remember that a single bee visits two or three hundred flowers in an hour, and that it must visit several hundreds in order to gather enough nectar to make one drop of honey, I think you will agree that it deserves its title.

But did you know that there are a great many trades among the bees, and that each one sticks to its own trade? First there are the mason bees who make the wax for the comb and fasten it to the roof of the hive. Then there are the sculptor bees who follow the masons and chisel and mould the wax into the correct shape. There are the engineer bees who look after the ventilation of the hive. When the summer days are hot, and the wax is likely to melt and become soft, they take up a position near the door of the hive and flap their wings to create a draught. Besides these there are the maids of honour who follow the queen wherever she goes and attend on her, and the nurse bees whose business it is to look after the young grubs and feed them. Most important of all are the sentinel bees who guard the door of the hive night and day, and who keep off all enemies and would-be intruders. So you see a hive is just like a town, buzzing with industry from morning till night.

2. Then another thing the bees teach us is *cleanliness.* They keep a spotless house. There is another class of bee I did not mention when going over bee-trades. Some people call them scavenger bees, but I think a much nicer name for them is housewife bees. When

the bees, after swarming, are busy building their new city in the new hive these housewife bees have their own task to perform. While the masons are making the wax and the sculptors are moulding it, the housewives are attending to the floor of the hive. They sweep the floor, and turn out every little bit of rubbish such as sand or dead leaves. And not only when the new home is being built, but all through the summer, they keep it beautifully clean. Sometimes in spite of the care of the sentinels a snail or a mouse gets into the hive. Should this happen the bees will sting it to death. But after they have killed it what are they to do with its body? If they cannot turn it out they will build a tomb of wax over it and seal it up carefully so that the dead body may not poison the hive.

3. Once more, the worker-bees can teach us a lesson in *unselfishness*. They work, not for themselves, but for the good of the hive. A very small quantity of honey serves for their own food, the rest goes to feed the queen, the grubs, and the drones, to make wax, or to be stored up for the winter. In the summer, two-thirds of the bees forsake the hive to make room for the younger generation. They leave behind them a beautiful city of wax filled with treasures of honey and pollen, and they go out to face poverty, for they have nothing until they build themselves a new city and fill it with provisions of honey and pollen. They will willingly die to save the queen's life. They keep their best food for her and should food be scarce they will give up their last drop of honey to her. If there

should be an accident and the hive should collapse, the queen will almost always be found alive underneath the bodies of her dead daughters.

But there are bees who are in every respect the opposite of the busy worker-bees. These are the drones or male bees. The drone is a very handsome fellow. He is much bigger than the worker-bee and wears a beautiful velvet suit. In front of his head he carries two feelers or antennæ that look like small plumes, and he has twenty-six thousand eyes.

Now this drone thinks himself a very important fellow, and he goes about the hive knocking down any one who gets in his path and looking scornfully on the busy little workers. But he is really a very contemptible sort of fellow. He is lazy, untidy, greedy and selfish. He does no work himself and he hinders other people in their work. He eats far more than a worker-bee—in fact it takes five or six workers to keep him supplied. He looks out for the nicest corners in the hive and eats the sweetest honey. In the hottest part of the summer days he saunters out for a visit to the flowers, but not that he may gather honey or pollen from them. Oh, dear no, he wants a sun-bath! When the day grows cooler he saunters back again to gorge himself on honey and go to sleep.

But when the autumn days come the prudent little worker-bees know that they have no food to spare to keep useless people alive during the long, cold winter. So one day the signal goes round, and the workers

either fall upon the drones and sting them to death, or turn them out-of-doors to die of starvation.

Now I think there are some boys and girls who are rather like the drones.

There are the lazy boys and girls who seem to think that other people are here to serve them, and who forget that we are really in this world to help and serve one another. They cannot put away their own slippers, or books, or toys. They cannot fasten their own buttons, untie their own knots, or learn their own lessons. They must always have someone running to tidy up after them or help them out of their difficulties. There are the greedy boys and girls who always look out for the sweetest cake or the biggest plum. And there are the selfish boys and girls who look out for the nicest seat or the cosiest corner, no matter how uncomfortable other people may feel.

When you are tempted to be lazy, or greedy, or selfish, remember that there is no room for drone boys and girls, that they are just a hindrance and a trouble to others. And remember, too, that one of the reasons why Jesus came into the world was to show people that the noblest work on earth is just serving one another.

SAMSON.

Remember me . . . and strengthen me . . . only this once. —Judg. xvi. 28.

THERE is a game we used to play when I was about your age—do you play at it still? I wonder. We used to ask each other questions such as—"Who was the meekest man in the Bible?"—"Moses." "Who was the oldest man?"—"Methuselah." And we went on to ask questions which had a pun in the answer, such as—"Who was the most timid man?" "Rabshakeh." Or, "Who was the smallest man?"—to which question some people answered, "Bildad the Shuhite"; whilst others preferred, "The man who slept in his watch." But the easiest question, and the one which even the youngest of us never made a mistake with, was—"Who was the strongest man?" We all knew the answer to that.

Yes, Samson was the strongest man in the Bible—in some ways. He was also the weakest—in other ways.

Can't you imagine him as a boy performing wonderful feats of strength whilst all his boy friends stood round in an admiring circle? You boys hero-worship a fine athlete. Samson's boy friends must have hero-worshipped him.

But Samson knew that he had not been given his strength for mere show. He had only to toss back his magnificent locks and he was reminded that God had given him his marvellous power for a purpose. For his long hair meant that he was a Nazirite. A Nazirite was one set apart for God's service, and among certain rules which he had to keep were two—he must never drink wine and he must never cut his hair. These were the outward signs of his relation to God. Samson's mother must often have told him how, before he was born, an angel had foretold his birth, had commanded that he should be brought up as a Nazirite, and had promised that he should "begin to save Israel" out of the hand of their enemies the Philistines.

For you must understand that at this time the Israelites had two great enemies—the Ammonites and the Philistines. The Philistines had grown so powerful that they had practically conquered the part of Canaan which belonged to the tribe of Dan—Samson's tribe. Worse still, they had conquered the spirit of the people as well. The Israelites had no heart to fight their oppressors. They just allowed themselves to be oppressed.

But this great jovial happy Samson, whose name just means "Sunny" or "Sun-man," had no intention of sitting down under the oppressors. He felt that God had given him his giant's strength for fighting. So alone, unbacked even by his own countrymen, he warred against the Philistines. He gave them no peace. He tormented them one way, he tormented

them another. He played what looked like huge practical jokes on them. He caught three hundred foxes, tied torches to their tails, and sent them among the Philistines' corn. He let the enemy take him and bind him with new ropes. Then, with one mighty wrench he broke the bonds, leapt free, and, seizing the jaw-bone of an ass, with that strange weapon slew a thousand Philistines. They thought they had got him safely shut up in the town of Gaza, and they planned to trap him at the gates in the morning; but he rose in the middle of the night and carried those same gates —posts and all—up to the top of a neighbouring hill.

For twenty years he ruled as judge in Israel and fought God's battles with God's enemies. And he might have reigned other twenty, but, alas! he began to forget that God had set him apart for a divine purpose. He forgot so badly that he even made friends with some of the Philistines themselves. And that was the cause of his death. For although he feared no man, Samson feared one thing—a woman's tongue—and a Philistine woman wheedled out of him the secret of his mighty power. He confessed to her in a weak moment that if his hair were cut his strength would disappear.

You know the rest of the story—how the woman sold the secret to her Philistine friends; how, while poor foolish Samson lay asleep, they cut his seven splendid locks; and how, when he wakened with the cry that the Philistines were "upon him," he found his strength gone.

You remember how they put out his eyes, bound him with fetters of brass, and set him to a task fit only for the lowest slaves — grinding corn in his prison-house.

Poor blind Samson! Can't you see him toiling there day after day, chafing against the misery of it all, yet powerless to rebel? Don't you see the Philistines going often to gaze at him and gloat over his helplessness?

But they did not notice one important thing. *Samson's hair was growing.*

There came a day when these same Philistines made a feast in honour of their god, the fish-god Dagon. They held the feast in Dagon's temple, and in the midst of the merry-making some of the crowd suggested that Samson should be brought in to amuse the company. It would be such rare sport, said they, to bait the fettered giant. So they led Samson into the court of the temple and they set him between the two great main pillars of the building, and they mocked him and jeered at him to their hearts' content. *But they forgot that Samson's hair had grown.*

So it fell that as the poor tortured giant heard the shouts of the people triumphing over him and exalting their false god over his God, the one true God, a rush of feeling swept over him. All in a moment he remembered what he might have done for God had he been true to his best self, and a passionate longing seized him that he might be avenged and that he might prove once, only once more, that Jehovah was

the God of gods. And with the rush of feeling there came also the knowledge that his strength had come back as his locks had grown. So, speaking quietly to the young man who led him, he said, "Guide my hands to the pillars of the temple that I may lean on them." And the lad did so. Then he sent up the prayer which is to-day's text: "O Lord God, remember me . . . and strengthen me . . . only this once." Thereupon he thrust at the pillars with all his might, and the temple of Dagon, with its crowd of worshippers, fell in one awful heap. God had heard His servant's prayer in that last hour of anguish.

There was once a dear little Highland girl, the daughter of a minister in one of the Western Islands. She noticed that her father always came home tired from the church meetings. "Why is father so unhappy when he has been at a church meeting?" she asked her mother one night. Rather unwisely, her mother answered, "Mr. Macleod is not always kind to father; he says things that pain him." What do you think that little girl did? She went and prayed with all her might that Mr. Macleod would die. Day after day she sent up the petition, "Oh God hear me, just this once!"

God did not answer her prayer by killing Mr. Macleod, but I'm sure He answered it in some better way. The story does not tell, but I shouldn't wonder if the end of it were that Mr. Macleod became quite kind and gentle. For though God does not answer the

foolish prayers we make in ways as foolish as the prayers themselves, He always answers *somehow*.

There is one prayer He answers very directly and very speedily, and that is a prayer like Samson's for strength to overcome God's enemies.

Who are God's enemies? They are not any one nation or any one people. They are just the enemies who make their home in your heart and mine, and their names are anger, hatred, jealousy, greed, evil-speaking. Against these God will ever lend us His aid. He will help us to crush them more truly than Samson crushed the Philistines in that temple of Dagon long ago.

TAKEN BY SURPRISE.

They dwelt careless, after the manner of the Zidonians, quiet and secure.—Judg. xviii. 7 (AV).

LONG, long ago, many hundreds of years before Christ came to the earth, there was a city away up in the north of Canaan called Laish. It was beautifully situated in the midst of a fertile land with plenty of wood and water. The people who lived in Laish were an easy-going, ease-loving sort of people. They had always had plenty to eat without putting themselves to much trouble; and as their neighbours did not bother themselves to harass them, they did not think it necessary to build defences round their town or to arm their men.

Now at the time of which I speak the Israelites had just taken possession of the land of Canaan, and they had divided it up, giving a certain part to each tribe. There was one tribe—the tribe of Dan—who were not quite pleased with the bit which had fallen to them. It was rather small for their number, and it was far too near their enemies, the fierce Philistines, so that they were constantly in danger of raids from them.

So the Danites determined that they would look out for a nice piece of land for themselves, and for this purpose they sent five spies all through the land of

Canaan. When the five men came to Laish, they said, "Here is the very thing we want—a beautiful wide, fertile country, and people in it who are careless about their defences, and can be easily conquered." They returned to the people of Dan, and told them all they had seen, and how easily the land could be subdued. And the Danites took six hundred armed men, and went up, and fell upon the city of Laish and captured it, killing the people, and burning the city.

Now I do not want you to think that the Danites were right in falling upon a defenceless city and slaughtering the inhabitants. That is an act which every right-thinking person nowadays holds in contempt. But what I wish you to notice is that the inhabitants of Laish had no right to leave their city undefended. They were living in wild times and should have done something to protect their homes and children. By acting as they did they were just inviting attack. If the Danites had found high walls round the city and armed men inside they would probably never have thought of trying to capture it; and if they had tried, they would most likely have been beaten. It was because they were so sure of their own safety that the people of Laish were undone.

We are fighting a foe much more wily than the Danites and much more cruel. His name is Satan, and he is always storming the city of our heart, for he is anxious to capture it. He is very clever, and he is very busy, and he is always on the look out for the people who are "dwelling careless," so we must guard

our city well if we do not wish it to fall into the hands of the enemy.

1. There are two ways that we must guard it. And the first way is to have it *well fortified.* We must not neglect our defences, and we must see that they are always in good order. It won't do to leave a weak spot anywhere, because the enemy is sure to find it. It was just where the people of Laish thought they were strong that they were really weak. They felt quite secure and that feeling of security brought about their downfall.

You remember how the city of Quebec was taken. A strong army under the French general Montcalm had held it all summer in spite of the many attempts of the British to capture it. At last General Wolfe thought of a plan. On the north-western side of the city rose some high land called the Heights of Abraham. The only way to these heights was by very steep cliffs. The French thought it would be impossible for any army to attack them on that side, so they left the north-western side of the city undefended. One dark night, when the people in the city were all asleep, General Wolfe led his men up the steep side of the precipice, and, when morning dawned, there was the British army looking down on the city. A short, fierce battle followed, and in a few hours Quebec was in the hands of the British.

Don't leave any little corner of your heart-city undefended, for Satan is very clever and he knows

exactly where he can most easily get at you. It is often not the places we think weakest that he attacks, because he knows we are hard at work defending these places. No, he has a much more wily way. He makes us think we are specially strong at some point—we are too honourable to tell a lie, too straight to do anything underhand—then along he sneaks and assaults us at the very point on which we were priding ourselves, and down we go. So we must look well to our defences.

And what are the best defences? Well, first of all we must build round our city a high wall—the high wall of *prayer*. And then we must arm it with a *good conscience* which tells us what is right and wrong, and a *firm will* which helps us to follow the right. Our conscience is a splendid defence if we keep it bright and shining. We can do this by listening to it, but if we do not listen, it becomes dull and rusty, and by and by ceases to be a defence. And our will is a splendid protection if we use it rightly, but if we do not use it in the right way it becomes weak and useless.

2. I said there were two ways in which we must defend our heart-city. The first way is by fortifications and the second way is by *watching*. For, however well fortified a city is, if we are not guarding it continually, the enemy may still get the better of us. What would you think of the sentinel who said, "Oh well, there are good thick walls round this city and there are splendid guns to defend it, so I'll just have

a little snooze"? Do you know what might happen while he slept? The enemy might scale those high walls and turn the splendid guns on the inhabitants of the city, and reduce the place to ruins.

So we must ever be watching, watching night and day. It is weary work sometimes, and we grow tired of the conflict. But there is One who never grows tired, One who is always watching; and if we have taken Him into the citadel of our heart He will guard it safely and give us the victory over our Arch-Enemy.

GLEANERS.

Let me glean . . . and gather after the reapers among the sheaves.—Ruth ii. 7.

THERE was a wonderful French painter called Millet. When he was a boy he was quite poor, his father being just what we in this country call a "crofter." When little Jean Millet sat down to dinner, it was at a very bare, homely table. But what did that matter? Jean had eyes that saw everything and he had a heart that loved those round about him. He saw old women gleaning in the harvest fields and he noticed that they looked tired and weary. And he noticed, too, that many field workers were very good and very reverent. When the Angelus, or call for evening prayer, rang out across the fields Jean watched the men take off their caps and close their eyes as if they prayed, while the women bowed their heads and looked solemn. In course of time, Jean became an artist, and painted a famous picture called "The Angelus." You must have seen a print of it: there are many of them all over the country. He also painted another called "The Gleaners." Those who visit country districts in France, and see the men and women working in the harvest fields, cannot help thinking of those two pictures of Millet's, "The Angelus"

and "The Gleaners." Through them the world has learnt to know and love the French peasantry.

But, boys and girls, there are pictures that are not painted on canvas. There are pictures painted in words- and in the Book of Ruth you will find a beautiful word, picture of a gleaner. It is finer than Millet's. Millet's work may become old-fashioned; people may one day speak of him as belonging to a past age. But the Bible picture of "Ruth the Gleaner" will be admired and loved as long as time lasts.

Gleaners had a real place in the Jewish harvest field. In our country, they would be spoken to sharply, and sent home. But there was an old Hebrew law about gleaning. Listen while I read it. "When ye reap the harvest of your land, thou shalt not wholly reap the corners of thy field, neither shalt thou gather the gleaning of thy harvest: thou shalt leave them for the poor, and for the stranger. . . . When thou reapest thine harvest in thy field, and hast forgot a sheaf in the field, thou shalt not go again to fetch it: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow: that the Lord thy God may bless thee in all the work of thine hands."

Ruth took her place among the poor and the strangers, the widowed and the orphaned in the fields of yellow barley.

She had to find food for herself and her old mother-in-law, Naomi, and as she had not the money to buy it she went bravely and humbly to gather the stray ears which the reapers left. And Boaz, the master of the

field, who had heard of Ruth's splendid devotion to her mother-in-law, arranged that Ruth's gleanings should be many. He commanded the harvesters to let her glean among the standing sheaves. He even told them to drop intentionally some extra ears of corn where she might pick them up.

You can picture the scene, can't you? There is a wonderful poem written by Keats to a nightingale, and in it he gives us his idea of that picture. He thinks of Ruth as listening to the nightingale whilst she gleans. Here is what he says:

Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird!
No hungry generations tread thee down;
The voice I hear this passing night was heard
In ancient days by emperor and clown:
Perhaps the self-same song that found a path
Through the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for home,
She stood in tears amid the alien corn.[1]

You see Keats pictured Ruth shedding tears of home-sickness at the song of the sweet-throated bird. But I think that if Ruth shed tears at all that day they were tears of joy, tears of gratitude and thankfulness.

"Ruth, the Gleaner," is an old time story. But during these September days, I hope many of you may have an opportunity of being in a harvest field. There is no fun like the fun of playing among the "stooks." Long ago, how we used to love to hear the swish of the scythe, and watch the women gathering the corn, and

[1] Keats, "Ode to a Nightingale."

binding the sheaves. You will not, I fear, see a real gleaner like Ruth. The gleaner in the field you visit will probably be just a boy with a big rake.

Take a good look at that boy. It may be worth your while. Underneath his silence there may be much that is worth copying. If a big person asked a Scottish "rake" how he liked his work, the answer would probably be as curt as "Fine." But the memory of not a few Scottish farm boys has come to be sacred. I knew one who became a great scholar. While he raked silently—for he rarely spoke—his mind was on his "version," and when he dreamed dreams—which he sometimes did—they were of going one day to the University.

"That is all very fine and fanciful," some boy here may be saying, "but I live in a city tenement, I never see the harvest fields." Let me tell you of a boy gleaner who never saw them either, a boy whose home was in a top flat. His name was Jim. He attended Sunday School, and one day the teacher put a question the answer to which involved the mention of an obscure classical character. To her surprise Jim answered correctly. "How did you come to know that?" she asked. "Please," he said, "they were taking in coals to the Academy; I followed the carts, and gathered up all the loose leaves in the yards and read them at home." Jim was a gleaner, and a good one.

And there was a little Italian fellow, called Michael. His father was a stone-cutter. The first sounds Michael knew were the ring of a hammer, and the

working of the chisel in the quarries. He was not a clever scholar. He just kept scribbling everything over with drawings. His father was disappointed and whipped the boy for spoiling the white-washed walls of the house. But whippings did no good. Michael went back to his drawings; he thought it was worth while suffering pain, so long as he could get on. He had made a great friend—a boy about his own age, who was learning to be an artist, and whose father had plenty of money. His name was Francesco. Every morning Francesco brought to Michael designs borrowed from his master's studio, and these Michael copied. He made wonderful progress, and in course of time became the great Michael Angelo. But I feel sure that he looked back to those days when he "gleaned" as being very happy days indeed.

In Lanarkshire there was born into a humble home, a boy who was named David. His father's name was Neil Livingstone. When David was quite little, he used to help his mother in the house. He did not quite like this work, and made it a condition that the house door should be kept shut so that the people passing might not see him working. At ten years of age he was sent to work in a factory. With his first half-crown, he bought an old Latin Grammar. He propped it up on the back of his spinning frame, and as he went backwards and forwards he learnt little bits by heart. That was "gleaning." I daresay you have guessed who that boy was. He became the great missionary, David Livingstone.

Boys and girls, this world is a wonderful harvest field. The little flowers! Can't we glean their sweetness? Can't we learn their names? There are men and women, as well as boys and girls, who glean constantly, and in ever so many different fields. They get to know a great deal, yet they themselves feel that they are but beginning to learn. Gleaning is work that makes one feel very happy. I can imagine how Ruth and Naomi would, at the end of the first day's work, thank God for His goodness.

When you go back to school you go to glean in a harvest field. Great reapers have been in front of you, and have left many sheaves. You surely will not throw away your splendid opportunities. And lying before you are the sheaves left by those who most of all wanted to know about God and His Son, Jesus Christ. Boys and girls, will you, along with your school work, try every day to glean a little knowledge of Jesus Christ. If you do, you will grow to be men and women who make the world better.

SOMEBODY'S NOTICING.

It hath fully been shewed me, all that thou hast done.
—Ruth ii. 11.

WHAT was it that Ruth had done that had been showed to Boaz? You remember the story. Elimelech, his wife Naomi, and their two boys had left Bethlehem and gone away into the land of Moab because there was a famine in their own land of Judah. Elimelech died in the foreign country, and his two sons, Mahlon and Chilion, married Orpah and Ruth, women of Moab. After a time Mahlon and Chilion died also, and Naomi, left without husband and children, made up her mind to return to her own land. Orpah and Ruth wished to accompany her, but Orpah was persuaded to turn back. Ruth, however, refused to be parted from the lonely old woman, though following Naomi meant leaving her home and country and friends, and going among a strange people who would neither like her nor understand her. It was this story that had come to the ears of Boaz.

When the two women arrived in Bethlehem it was the beginning of the barley harvest. They were very poor and had no food, so Ruth made up her mind to go and work among the gleaners in the harvest; for the Jews had a law that the gleanings of the field—the

stray ears that had not been gathered up—should be left for the poor and the stranger.

I sometimes think Ruth was almost braver when she went out to glean that morning than when she decided to leave home and kinsfolk for Naomi's sake. To begin with, she was mixing with the very poorest of the land, and Ruth had been brought up in a home of comfort and ease. Then she had hard work to do under the burning sun; and, worst of all, she was a foreigner and belonged to a race that were hated and despised by the Israelites. Her skin was dark, and her clothes were strange. The girls who were working in the field would laugh at her, the young men would make fun of her, everybody would stare and pass remarks.

Now Ruth had chanced to choose the field of Boaz, who was a wealthy and much-thought-of man in Bethlehem, and a relation of her late husband. When Boaz came to the field to see how the reapers were getting on, he at once noticed the foreign woman, and asked who she was. When he heard her name he remembered the story that had been told him of Ruth's courage and unselfishness and devotion, and he gave orders that she should be respected, and treated with special kindness. Then Ruth fell at his feet and asked him why he had been so kind, and he told her the reason—"It hath fully been shewed me, all that thou hast done unto thy mother in law since the death of thine husband: and how thou hast left thy father and thy mother, and the land of thy nativity, and art come unto a people which thou knewest not heretofore."

You know the end of the story—how Boaz married Ruth and how she became the mother of Obed, who was the grandfather of King David.

I think there are two things we can learn from this story of Ruth; and the first thing is that *the beauty that matters is beauty of character.*

It was Ruth's beautiful character that attracted Boaz, not her beautiful face. I think if Boaz had not heard what she had done, he would have taken no more notice of her. He would probably have given an order that she should be treated civilly, for he was a kind and courteous man, but he would not have singled her out for special kindness, and he would have gone home and forgotten all about her. We cannot all have beautiful faces; but we can all have beautiful souls. We cannot all be clever, or witty, or gifted; but we can all be faithful, and loving, and unselfish, as Ruth was; and that is of far more value.

Remember there is an ugliness which spoils beauty. It doesn't matter how pretty you are, if you are not beautiful within your character will soon be written on your face. The haughty look and curling lip of pride, the drooping mouth of discontent, the tight hard lips of selfishness, the scowl of anger—one or other will be seen on your face for anyone to read.

And remember, too, that there is a beauty which shines through ugliness, which shines through it until it shines all the ugliness away.

There was a little French girl once who was very

plain-looking. One day her mother said to her, "My dear, you are so ugly that no one will ever fall in love with you." Those words would have made some little girls hard and bitter, but they had quite the opposite effect on the little French girl. From that day she began very hard to think about other people. She was always trying to make somebody happy—the children in the village, the servants in the house, even the very birds that hopped about the garden. By and by she grew up and went out into society. Her goodwill and her unselfishness made her the idol of Paris. Great men and noble women loved her. She became a leader in society, and people forgot her plain looks because they loved her so much.

And the other thing I want you to notice is *the value of a good name.* We are told that "A good name is better than precious ointment." Take care of your good name. We never know who is taking notes. Ruth did not think she was doing anything specially virtuous that day she chose Naomi and exile and the God of Israel rather than home and comfort and the gods of Moab. But people had noticed her self-sacrifice, and they talked about it. They had talked about it even when she thought they were despising her, and it had come to the ears of Boaz.

Now, while it is very foolish always to be wondering what people are thinking of us, it is well to remember that the people who are worth minding value worth. The young men and maidens in the harvest field might laugh at Ruth, but Boaz, the brave and courteous, saw

in her all that was noble and best in woman. And even when those around us do not value or understand us, God sees and knows, and if we are faithful in the work that He gives us to do, that is all that really matters.

A LITTLE COAT.

His mother made him a little coat, and brought it to him from year to year.—1 Sam. ii. 19 (AV).

Is there a boy or girl here who does not like to get new clothes? Every girl is proud of her new dress, of her latest hat, even of her new boots. And I have known a little boy who, when he got a new jacket, asked his mother to allow it to lie on his pillow at night.

Your sermon this morning is about a boy's coat. And the owner of it was a little fellow named Samuel. He was the son of two plain people called Hannah and and Elkanah, who lived at a place called Ramah. Hannah had prayed to God to send her a son, and had promised that if God granted her request she would give the boy to the Lord's service. And she really meant it. When a wee mite, Samuel was taken to Shiloh, and made a sort of errand boy in the House of the Lord.

What a quaint little figure he must have been! He wore a linen robe called an ephod. It was the same as a priest's dress, only, over the ephod, the priests had a rich flowing cloak, which was sometimes very beautiful. It was this upper coat that Hannah took to Samuel every year, and although he lived constantly beside an

old priest named Eli, and was being taught to think of nothing but religion and God's word, Samuel could not change his nature. He was just a boy like any of you. Wouldn't he be proud of each new coat as it arrived? And the thought that he was to see his mother would keep him from sleeping for nights before she came.

It is a beautiful touch in the story of Samuel's life this of his mother making the little coat that was like the big priest's one. It makes us think of the home at Ramah, and of the loving hearts there. Hannah could not buy the linen of which the coat was made. Each Israelite had to grow on his own farm what he needed for himself and his family, of food, and clothing, and fuel. Doubtless Elkanah sowed and reaped the flax which she span, and wove, and bleached into the linen web, out of which she shaped the little garment she took to Shiloh. And all the time she span and wove and cut and sewed her dreams would be of Samuel's future. Many a wish would she frame, and many a prayer would she utter, that her boy would grow up to serve God and his generation.

When Samuel grew to be a great man, do you think Hannah would be proud? I believe, rather, she would be like the mother of David Livingstone, when at last the world acknowledged him a great man. A neighbour visiting her during her last illness said, "You'll be richt proud o' yer son noo, Agnes?" to which she gave the unexpected reply, "I'm nae prouder o' him the day than when he put the first half-crown he ever earned into my lap." Hannah, we feel sure, never felt

prouder of Samuel than she did when he was the little errand boy in the House of the Lord.

I wonder if Samuel had a little return gift ready for his mother when she came up each year. He would have no Saturday pennies to spend, but he would have treasures like every other boy that ever lived. I wonder if he offered her one of his treasures to show her how much he loved her for her loving thought of him. Perhaps he just took his mother's love for granted as did the little boy I read of the other day.

He was a little street urchin, and he asked a lady to give him a job. "I've got three pennies," he said, "but I want to earn a bit more."

"Yes," said she, "and what are you going to do with your money?"

"Well," he replied (it was Christmas time), "I'm going to get some baccy for Dad, an' a tin 'orse for our li'l Bill, an' a sweet-stuff for Gladys."

"Ah!" said the lady, "I see—some tobacco for your father, a tin horse for little Bill, and some sweets for Gladys. And what for your mother?"

"Oh! Muvver!" he exclaimed, "she don't want anythink. Leastways"—and he paused—"she never *asks* for nuffin."

Boys and girls, do you take your mother's love as a matter of course? Then remember this — there's nothing in the world quite like it. It gives, gives, gives, and asks for nothing. Yes, it asks for nothing, but it craves something all the same. It craves love in return. No gift you can bring your mother will be

dearer to her than your love. And if that love is the right kind of love it cannot help showing itself in thoughtful deeds and loving words. Your mother will notice these, she will treasure them more than the costliest gifts—though I hope you won't forget the gifts too.

There is only one love more wonderful and more unselfish than a mother's love. It, too, loves and gives, loves and forgives, again and again. It, too, yearns for love in return. What are you going to give God, boys and girls, for all He showers on you? There is one priceless gift you can give Him—a gift that no money can buy. Will you take all and give nothing? Or will you give Him the gift He longs for—your heart?

THE CHILD-PROPHET.

And the child Samuel grew on, and was in favour both with the Lord, and also with men.—1 Sam. ii. 26.

If you look carefully at the text you will see that it tells us three things about Samuel. First it tells us that he grew, next that he was in favour with God, and lastly that he was in favour with men.

1. "Samuel grew." He was just like other boys and girls. He grew in *height.* Year by year as Hannah brought him his new coat he would compare it with the old one to see how many inches he had grown. Some years the old one would seem shorter than usual because he had been growing faster. I wonder if he was ever measured against a wall or a door as we sometimes are, and if Eli kept a record of his height.

And then he grew in *strength.* Each year he was able to run faster and farther, and to do his work quicker and better. Sometimes, I daresay, he looked at his arms to see how powerful the muscles were getting. He could lift heavier weights and throw farther and straighter than he used to do.

He grew in *wisdom.* That doesn't mean that he just grew in knowledge. You may fill your heads with all kinds of knowledge and yet be much less wise than you were to begin with. Samuel learned a lot of things

from Eli, but he knew how to use what he had learned, and he thought out things for himself and gained in common sense.

But Samuel grew not only in body and mind, he grew also in *heart and soul.* There is no use growing at all if you don't grow the right way. Some people grow big bodies and large minds and little, deformed, ugly souls. They grow backwards instead of forwards, so that their friends say of them: "I wish they were small again. They were much nicer and much better then."

Samuel might easily have grown backwards instead of forwards. Perhaps we think that, living in the tabernacle with old Eli, he had no temptations and that it was easy for him to be good. But Eli was not the only man in the tabernacle. There were his two wicked sons Hophni and Phinehas. Samuel must have known something of their evil ways. Perhaps they laughed at him sometimes, and very likely they tried to tempt him to follow in their footsteps. But Samuel kept steadily on his own brave way. Day by day he grew into the great, wise, noble soul who was to rule and guide Israel, and then one night God spoke to him and all Israel knew that Samuel was a prophet.

2. Samuel was "in favour with God." God loves us all, even when we hurt and spurn Him, but I think He loves in a special kind of way those who love and try to follow Him. It is just as if they were His very, very own, given back to Him to keep for ever. Samuel had been promised to God before he was born, he had

been brought up very near to God in the tabernacle, and he had grown to love and own Him as his God.

3. Lastly, Samuel was "in favour with men." That means that he was well liked by his friends and companions. He must have been a good sort, who would do another a kind turn if he could. And he must have been jolly too and full of fun.

Remember three things. In order to be good you don't need to be ugly or ill-grown. In order to be good you don't need to be disagreeable. In order to be good you don't need to be unpopular. True, there are times when you must risk your popularity to stick up for the right. But the people who really matter will only admire you the more for it. The right people will always respect real worth. To be in favour with God you don't need to be out of favour with men.

Many hundreds of years later there was another boy who lived in the same land, of whom almost the same words were spoken. We are told that He "advanced in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and men." Samuel, like all boys, must have had his faults, but this other boy is our Perfect Pattern, for He did no sin; and if we strive to grow like Jesus then we shall come to a noble stature and to the likeness of a perfect man.

THE RIGHT KIND OF EARS.

Speak; for thy servant heareth.—1 Sam. iii. 10.

THE other day I read a story which came all the way from Japan. A missionary was walking along the streets of a Japanese town, and at one corner he came upon a man who had a group of children gathered round him. He was telling them a story. This was the story he told.

"Once upon a time a little boy went to heaven and when he got there he saw some very queer things lying on a shelf. 'What are these for?' he asked. 'Are they to make soup of?' 'Oh no,' was the reply, 'these are the ears of the little boys and girls who never paid any attention to what they heard. The good things never got past their ears, and so when they died their ears got to heaven but the rest of their bodies did not.' A little farther on he saw another shelf with more queer things laid on it. Again he asked, 'Are these for soup?' 'Oh no,' was the reply, 'these are the tongues of the little boys and girls who were always telling other people how to be good but were never good themselves, and so when they died their tongues came to heaven but the rest of their bodies did not.'"

Now of course this is just a fairy story, but like many a fairy story it has a meaning. God has given

us hands and feet and ears and eyes and tongues and hearts and minds; and He means us to use them in the right way. Some people don't use them at all, and some people use them in a wrong way. And so for a few Sundays I want to talk to you about the right way of using those gifts which God has given to us.

To-day I am going to speak about the right kind of ears. Ears are very important things, are they not? We could not get along very well without them. You will find your text in the First Book of Samuel, the third chapter and the tenth verse—"Speak; for thy servant heareth."

You all know the story of Samuel. You remember how his mother prayed that if God would send her a son she would lend him to the Lord all the days of his life. You recall how she brought him to Eli the priest when he was a little boy of about three years, so that he might serve God in the tabernacle. You remember how Samuel was busy in the tabernacle doing the little odd jobs—running messages for Eli, drawing the curtains which formed the doors, trimming and lighting the lamps—until one night when he was asleep in one of the rooms beside the tabernacle court something great happened—God spoke to him.

Samuel had the right kind of ears. But what are the right kind of ears? I suppose we have all got ears, and yet they are not always the right kind of ears, because we don't use them in the right way. It was a frequent saying of Christ's—"He that hath ears to hear, let him hear." A great many of the people to

whom He spoke did not understand Him. It is said of His own parents who had brought Him up—"They understood not the saying which he spake unto them," and sometimes even His disciples, who were so much in His company, did not understand His word. They were not listening in the right way.

Well, there are four things that the right kind of ears must be.

1. They must be *open* ears. Your ears would be no use to you at all if they were deaf, and they would be of very little use if you stuffed them with cotton-wool.

What is it that deafens people's ears to God's voice? Very often it is the din of the world. It is so loud in their ears that they don't hear the still, small voice. And sometimes it is cares and worries that shut their ears, and sometimes it is indulgence in sin. I think the ears of children are often more open to God's call than the ears of grown-up people, because they are not deafened by the noise of the world—by its pleasures, and cares, and sins.

2. The right kind of ears must be *understanding* ears. Your hearing may be perfect, and yet you may not know what a person is saying, because he is talking in a foreign language.

We must have ears that understand God's language. And yet it is no foreign tongue in which God speaks to us, but the language of our everyday life. Only we mistake His voice for the voice of other people.

Even Samuel made this mistake at first. God called to him and he thought the voice was Eli's. And God speaks to us often in the voice of our minister, or our teacher, or our mother. We think it is they who are speaking and it is really God.

Why, if we only understood, we could hear God speaking to us constantly, for He speaks in so many different ways. When you see any beautiful sight, or hear any beautiful sound that makes you wish to be good, that is God speaking. God made all things beautiful and He speaks to us through them. When you hear or read about brave and noble men and women and feel you would like to resemble them, that is God speaking again.

3. The right kind of ears must be *attentive* ears. Your hearing may be perfect and people may be talking in your own language, and yet you may not hear because you are not listening. Mother asks you three or four times to run on an errand for her, but you are so engrossed in your book or your game that you don't hear her. And sometimes we don't hear God's voice, because we don't stop to listen for it.

4. The right kind of ears must be *obedient* ears. You may have perfect hearing, you may understand, you may be quite aware of what is going on around you, and yet you may not hear because you do not *wish* to listen. Samuel learned obedience by doing the unimportant, uninteresting, drudging work in the tabernacle, and when God's call came he was ready for it.

Let no boy or girl be ashamed to obey. It is only

those who have learned to obey who know how to command. Baden-Powell tells a story of a man in the Boer war who spoilt a very promising ambuscade by disobeying an order. The men had been forbidden to fire, but one man fired a shot and made the enemy aware of the force which was lying in wait for them. "It would have been different," said Baden-Powell, "if he had learned to obey when he was a boy."

So the right kind of ears are those that hear God's call and obey it. And I want you to notice in the last place that God calls boys and girls. He called Samuel in the tabernacle, He called David, the shepherd lad, He made use of a little maid in His healing of Naaman, the Syrian. Jesus called the little children to Him when He was here below, and the disciple who lay upon His bosom was the youngest of the twelve. God calls boys and girls. Let us ask Him to give us the right kind of ears so that we may all hear and obey His call.[1]

[1] The texts of the other sermons in the series are Exod. xxiii. 9, Ps. xxiv. 4 (2), Ps. xxxiv. 13, Prov. vi. 13, Mal. i. 13, Luke vi. 41, 1 Pet. iii. 4, 1 Pet. v. 5.

INQUIRE WITHIN.

Man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart.—1 Sam. xvi. 7.

SUPPOSING somebody came to this town to-day and announced that they had been sent to elect, from among the boys and girls, a king or queen to reign over a new country, what excitement there would be!

If the choice were to be left to the boys and girls themselves, I wonder who would be picked out. Would it be the boy who was biggest and strongest, or best at games, or head of his class? Would it be the girl who was prettiest, or cleverest, or most popular?

But supposing the stranger announced that there was to be an examination of hearts, and that the boy or girl with the best heart was to be selected, I wonder again who would be chosen. Some of those whom we should have put near the top of the list would be away down at the bottom, and some decent sort of boy of whom nobody took much notice, or some plain-looking, awkward, shy, little girl, would be at the very top.

Now something like this once happened in Bethlehem about a thousand years before Jesus was born there. Only people did not know it was a king who was

being elected; they probably thought that Samuel was choosing a pupil for his School of Prophets.

It happened like this. Saul by his pride and disobedience had forfeited his right to be king over Israel, and God sent Samuel to Jesse, the Bethlehemite, to choose a new king from amongst his sons.

So Jesse made his sons pass in order before the prophet. First came Eliab, the eldest. He was a fine, big, strong man, and when Samuel saw him he thought, "This is just the very man to be a king, and to lead the armies of Israel to victory." But God said to Samuel, "Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have rejected him: for the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart." Then came Abinadab the second son, and Shammah the third. The fourth, and the fifth, and the sixth, and the seventh also passed by; but always the answer was the same—"Neither hath the Lord chosen this."

At last David was sent for to the hills where he was tending the sheep. His father had not thought it worth while to summon him: he was just a boy, and did not count. But when he appeared, God said to Samuel, "Arise, anoint him: for this is he."

You know what a splendid king David afterwards made—a king brave and faithful, the best that Israel ever had. You also know how, later, Eliab showed that he had a petty, jealous nature quite unworthy of a true king. And you remember that it was David,

the shepherd lad, not the strong warrior, Eliab, who fought Goliath.

I suppose if we had been in Samuel's place that day we should have made the same mistake as he—we should have thought Eliab the best man to fill the position of king. It is so easy to judge by appearances, and so difficult not to do so.

Perhaps you have a friend who is clever, or witty, or jolly, and you think he is just first-rate; but if you could see his heart as God sees it, you might find it very black. And perhaps you have another friend who is rather unattractive. He dosen't shine, and he isn't very good company. For all that, he may be the very best kind of friend, sincere and true—the kind that will stick to you through thick and thin.

Remember it is not always the birds with the finest feathers that have the sweetest song. The peacock and the parrot have gorgeous plumage; but when they really show what they can do in the way of uplifting their voices, the first thing *you* want to do is to put your fingers in your ears. The blackbird, and the thrush, and the nightingale, and the lark have very plain dull coats; but when they begin to sing the air is filled with their melody and the world seems a sweeter, fairer place. And it isn't always the people who look grandest or greatest who are the truest and best.

A surly old baron was once travelling in Sweden. Now in some parts of that country where it is very rough and hilly people still travel by stage-

coach, just as they used to do in this country before there were railways and trains. And here and there along the road are inns where their tired horses can be changed for fresh ones so that they can get along faster.

One day this surly old nobleman arrived at such an inn and immediately demanded fresh horses in a gruff and rude way. The landlord said he was very sorry he had none to give him, and that he would just have to wait till his own horses were rested.

As he was speaking, a pair of beautiful horses were brought out and hitched to a carriage where sat a little quiet-looking gentleman. The baron was very angry. He asked the landlord what he meant by telling him he had no horses when he had this pair, but the innkeeper replied that the horses had already been ordered by the gentleman in the carriage.

Thereupon the baron approached the insignificant little gentleman. "Look here, my man," he said, "give me those horses and I'll pay you well for them." The other replied quietly, but firmly, that he required the horses and that he was just about to start. At this the nobleman began to fume. "Why," he muttered to himself, "this fellow surely cannot know what an important person I am!" And aloud he said, "Perhaps you don't know who I am? I am Field-Marshal Baron George Sparre, the last and only one of my race." The other smiled, quite unperturbed. "I am glad of that," said he, "it would be terrible to think there might be more of you." And in another moment he was gone.

When he had disappeared the landlord turned to the churlish nobleman. "That," said he, "was the King of Sweden!" You can imagine how the baron felt, but it was too late to undo the mistake he had made—the mistake of judging by appearances.

There is just one thing more I want you to remember. Very often we are judged by our outside. Other people estimate us by our appearance, or our manner, or the things we say and do, but God judges us by our heart. He looks right into it and He sees things that our nearest friends don't see. He knows how hard we tried to be good that time we failed. He knows what it cost us to keep our temper when it was sorely tried. He knows what it meant to be true and straight and unselfish when we were tempted to be the opposite. And He knows, too, the splendid men and women we are able to become if we will let Him take possession of those hearts He can see so well, if we will let Him rule there.

ONLY A SHEPHERD BOY.

Behold, he keepeth the sheep.—1 Sam. xvi. 11.

THAT was all they could say about David. He was just the shepherd boy, and not worth the trouble of calling, and yet it was the shepherd boy that God chose to be king over Israel.

You remember how Samuel was sent to Bethlehem to anoint a king from among Jesse's sons. And you remember how Jesse brought forward his seven elder sons one by one. Fine, big, stalwart men they were, but as each one passed along God whispered to Samuel that this was not the man of His choice. Then Samuel asked Jesse if all his sons were present, and the old man replied that he had still one son, but he had really not thought of summoning him. He was only the herd boy, a mere lad of fifteen, and God could not possibly want *him*. Yet it was just the shepherd lad that God did want; and when David came He told Samuel to arise and anoint him.

Now I like that story: and I like this verse because it tells me that the very thing Jesse and his sons thought least of, God thought most of. David was just the keeper of the sheep. His was an occupation that was rather looked down upon and was usually

given to the younger members of the family, yet it was just because he was a keeper of the sheep that God chose him. There is a verse in the Psalms which tells us that God chose David and took him from the sheepfolds to feed His people Israel. Just because he knew how to lead and care for the sheep, he knew how to lead and care for a nation. Jesse and Samuel might have thought that one of the soldier brothers would make a fitter king, but God knew better.

1. Now will you notice, first, that *the humblest work is worth doing well.*—David's friends might look down on his occupation, but he loved his sheep and he did his best for them. He was a good shepherd and he put his heart and soul into his work. I don't know whether Samuel told him just then that he was to be king, but David knew he had been set aside for some great purpose; yet after he had been anointed, he went quietly back to his sheep and waited till God called him to some other work.

Now we are sometimes tempted to look down on our work because it is commonplace and dull. When you feel like that will you try to remember that the work you are doing is just God's bit of work for you, and that you can make it something fine by doing it well.

I read a story once about a prisoner who was imprisoned for life. And in the prison he was given some work to do. His work was to weave a piece of cloth out of a coarse dull thread. There was no change

in the work and no variety. Day after day he had to weave the same kind of cloth out of the same kind of thread. But one day the jailer came to him and told him that because he had done his work so well he would be allowed in future to weave a rose-coloured thread into the cloth. That made all the difference in the world. After that the prisoner felt he had something to live for. He looked forward to weaving in the rose-coloured thread. And when the pieces of cloth were finished he often took them up again to look at the bright thread shining out of the dull material.

I think David had found the rose-coloured thread. Do you know what it was? Out there among the everlasting hills with the twinkling stars shining down on him he had learned to know and to love God, and that made all the difference to his work. It was God's bit of work for him just then, and he meant to make it something grand and glorious.

2. Again, will you try to remember that *humble work well done prepares us for higher service.*—The work you are doing now is making you ready for something bigger ahead, only you must do the little things well or you won't be fit for the big things when they come.

Sometimes you hear people complaining that they have no luck and that they never had a chance. Did you ever hear the story of how Luck went visiting and how he was received? Here it is—

Luck tapped upon a cottage door,
A gentle, quiet tap;
And Laziness, who lounged within,
The cat upon his lap,
Stretched out his slippers to the fire
And gave a sleepy yawn:
"Oh, bother! let him knock again!"
He said; but Luck was gone.

Luck tapped again, more faintly still,
Upon another door,
Where Industry was hard at work
Mending his cottage floor.
The door was opened wide at once;
"Come in!" the worker cried,
And Luck was taken by the hand
And fairly pulled inside.

He still is there—a wondrous guest,
From out whose magic hand
Fortune flows fast, but Laziness
Can never understand
How Industry found such a friend;
"Luck never came *my* way!"
He sighs, and quite forgets the knock
Upon his door that day.[1]

So you see we must just grind away at the monotonous, commonplace things if we ever want to do anything bigger. If David hadn't been a good shepherd he would never have made a good king. If he hadn't been a good shepherd he would never have been a king at all, for God would not have chosen him.

[1] Priscilla Leonard, in *A Garland of Verse*, 82.

FIVE SMOOTH STONES.

He chose him five smooth stones out of the brook.—1 Sam. xvii. 40.

I DON'T need to tell any of you the story of how David fought and conquered the giant Goliath. I expect you could tell it to me a great deal better than I could tell it to you. It is one of the most splendid stories in the Bible—that tale of how the young shepherd lad from the hills, strong in his confidence in God, overcame the big bully before whom all the mighty warriors of Israel trembled.

I want to speak to-day about David's weapons—the five smooth stones he chose from the brook. You remember how Saul clothed the boy in his own armour, and how awkward David felt in it. He was unaccustomed to it, and when he found it hampered him he wisely put it off and armed himself with the weapons he *could* use.

The Philistines had camped on the side of a mountain and the Israelites on a mountain opposite. Between the two armies lay a valley, and at the bottom of the valley a deep gorge containing the bed of a stream. In crossing the gorge to fight Goliath, David picked up five smooth stones and put them in his shepherd's bag ready for his sling.

Now we have all giants to conquer, and some of them are very big, and very terrifying, and we are sometimes dreadfully afraid they will get the better of us. "Oh," you say, "that is all nonsense. There are no fierce giants stalking about the land now, seeking whom they may slay." Yes, there are still giants; they are every bit as terrible as Goliath; and there is still a call for Davids to slay them. Would you like to know their names? Here are a few: Selfishness, Envy, Pride, Temper, Laziness, Untruthfulness. Would you like to know where they dwell? In the hearts of boys and girls, and men and women.

And how are we going to conquer those giants? With five smooth stones. The first smooth stone is *Humility.* And how is humility going to help us to conquer our giants? Because it teaches us to know our own weakness, and leads us to rely on God's strength. There is a verse in the Book of Proverbs which says that "Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall." It is the boy who boasts whom we expect to fail.

There is a Russian story of an owl who tried to show the way to a blind ass. Now the owl, you know, can see very well in the dark, because its eyes are made for that purpose, but when morning dawns it gets dazzled with the strong light, and hides itself in caves, or barns, or hollow trees.

Well, this particular owl got on all right as long as it was dark. It perched on the ass's back and directed it safely. But when the sun rose it could no longer see

properly and, instead of confessing its helplessness, it pretended still to know the way. It told the ass to turn to the left when it should have turned to the right, and they fell together over a steep precipice.

We cannot conquer our giants by our own power alone. If we try to do so, we shall sooner or later come to grief like the self-sufficient owl. David knew his weakness as well as his strength. He said to Goliath, "Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a javelin: but I come to thee in the name of the Lord of hosts."

So the first smooth stone is Humility—the recognition of our own limitations, and the first stone leads to the second—the smooth stone of *Faith*—reliance on God's help. It was David's faith that made him strong to conquer. He had entire confidence in God. He trusted Him as a little child trusts his father. He knew that God had delivered him from the lion and the bear, and he was certain that He would give him the victory when he was fighting the enemy of God's people. We are fighting God's enemies when we are fighting our sins, and if we trust in Him, we are sure to conquer.

And the second smooth stone—the stone of Faith—leads to the third — the smooth stone of *Courage*. Faith is the root of courage. It was David's faith that gave him courage to fight Goliath when the strong warriors fled before him. It was faith that steadied his arm when he took aim. The heroes of the world have been men of faith. And if we are to conquer our

enemies we shall require courage, the courage that comes from faith. Sometimes our giants will seem so appalling that we shall be tempted to think we cannot slay them. But we must never lose heart. Let us remember how easily Goliath was overcome when faced by a man of courage.

But there is another smooth stone we must use if we want to conquer—the smooth stone of *Prayer*. It is Prayer that keeps the stones of Faith and Courage smooth and polished. We are not told that David offered up a prayer before he went to meet Goliath, but I am quite sure he spoke to God in the silence of his heart. Out on the lonely hillside, when he was watching the sheep, David had often communed with God, and he would not have had such splendid faith and courage unless he had lived very near to God in prayer. For prayer is one of God's ways of bringing us near to Him; and Satan cannot get hold of us when we are close to God.

So when we feel as if our giants were to get the better of us the very best thing to do is just to send up a little cry to God to help us. He will surely come to our aid.

And the last smooth stone is *Endeavour*. We must do our part. We must not sit still and expect God to do everything for us while we do nothing. That would be making our prayers a mockery.

Do you remember Wellington's advice to his soldiers? "Say your prayers, and keep your powder dry." They were right to pray, but their prayers would not be of

much use if they neglected the means of victory, if they allowed their powder to get so wet that it would be useless. And a young Commodore in the French navy once gave similar advice to the sailors under him. A terrible storm was raging; the ship was in great peril; the sailors had lost heart, and were relaxing their efforts at the pump. But the Commodore cheered them, and encouraged them to go on. "All your prayers are good," he said, "but Saint Pump! He'll save you!"

David did not conquer the giant without fighting him, and his skill with the sling helped him. And we cannot expect to conquer our giants unless we fight them, unless we use along with the four smooth stones of Humility, and Faith, and Courage, and Prayer, the fifth stone of Endeavour.

THE FRIEND OF DAVID.

The soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul.—1 Sam. xviii. 1.

I WANT to speak to-day about something which all boys and girls possess. Some have a great many, others only a few, others again just one, but that one is a very special one. Some are changing them every day, each morning they have a new one. Others have kept theirs for months or years, and they intend, if possible, to keep them all their life.

Would you like to know what this wonderful and mysterious thing is? Well, it is just a friend.

All of you have friends; some more, some fewer, and very often you hear people telling you how necessary it is to choose the right kind of friend. Yes, that is very important; but there is something just as important, if not more so, and that is how to *be* the right kind of friend.

Now in this book there is the story of a friendship which is perhaps the finest in the world. And I should like you to read that story and think a great deal about it, partly because it is very beautiful, but chiefly because it shows us better than any other tale does the kind of friend we should choose and be. It is the story of David and Jonathan.

Jonathan met David on the day that the young shepherd slew Goliath. Saul had expressed a desire to talk with the conqueror of the giant and David was brought into his presence. And when the shepherd lad had made an end of speaking, "the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul." They were bound in one for ever and ever.

Did you ever think how strange it was that Jonathan should fall in love with David just then? It is true that there was much to admire in the young conqueror. He had done a glorious deed and delivered his countrymen out of the hands of the Philistines. He was brave and daring. He was good to look upon, and winsome and modest in his manner.

Yes, but David had just carried off the laurels that might have been Jonathan's. For Jonathan was no coward. A few years before he, with the help of only his armour-bearer, had climbed the face of a precipitous rock, fallen upon the garrison of the Philistines, and slain twenty men. We cannot tell why Jonathan did not fight Goliath. Perhaps Saul prevented his going. Samuel the prophet had told Saul that his son would never reign, and Saul may have feared that the prophecy would be fulfilled by Goliath's killing Jonathan.

Whatever the reason, Jonathan did not grudge David the triumph. He rejoiced with him. It made his heart glad to see that the boy was so brave and chivalrous. His love was too big and generous to find any room for jealousy.

And it was the same all through. For it was not long before Jonathan came to know that David was the man whom God had chosen to succeed Saul on the throne, that David was the man who was to fill the place that was his (Jonathan's) by right. The knowledge filled Saul with mad envy, but Jonathan never showed anything except pride and gladness in regard to it. David's gain was always Jonathan's loss, and yet Jonathan was ever able to rejoice in that gain. Again and again Jonathan might have got rid of David simply by delivering him into Saul's hands, but he never betrayed his friend. Instead of that he comforted and reassured David, he pleaded with his father for him, he risked his own life to save him.

Now the question is. Can our friendship go the length that Jonathan's did? Can we be glad when our best friend at school carries off the prize we have worked so hard to win? Can we be glad when he succeeds at the price of our failure or loss? Well, it is very, very difficult, but there is just one way we can do it—by putting ourselves absolutely in the background.

There is a fine story told of the great English painter Turner. At one time Turner was on a committee for arranging about the hanging of pictures which were to be exhibited in London. At the last moment, when all the walls were full, a picture by an unknown artist came in. Turner said, "This is a good picture. It must be hung." But the other members of committee replied, "That is impossible. There is no room for it."

Very quietly Turner said, "I will arrange it." And he took down one of his own pictures and hung the new one in its place.

Don't you think that was a fine thing to do? And, boys and girls, it is the people who are truly great who can do things like that. Ask God to give you a big, generous, self-forgetting heart. Then, and then only, will you be able to be a friend like Jonathan.

There are just two other things I should like you to notice about Jonathan's friendship for David. They are the marks of the truest and best friendship wherever you find it.

And, first, Jonathan was an absolutely *loyal* friend, absolutely loyal and courageous. When he found out that Saul wanted to take David's life he went and "spake good of David unto Saul his father." And that was a difficult thing to do. It was difficult because he risked his own life in doing it, and it was difficult because it is always hard to stand alone and plead for some one who is unpopular or out of favour.

Jonathan was loyal, too, because he stuck to David through thick and thin, through evil fortune and good He was as much David's friend when the latter was a hunted outlaw as when he was in the king's court. He was *more* his friend, for it was when David was in trouble that Jonathan helped him most.

And so if you would be like Jonathan, be loyal and faithful to your friends. Defend them when others are running them down. Be even more their friend in the dark days, for they need you more then.

And the other thing I want you to notice about Jonathan's friendship is that it was always *helpful* and *uplifting*. David was never the worse of Jonathan's company, but always the better. Jonathan cheered him when he was in despair; he lifted him up and put courage and faith into him.

Charles Kingsley was once asked what was the secret of his beautiful life, and he replied, "I had a friend."

Wouldn't you like to be a friend like that, a friend that makes the lives of others gladder and better and more beautiful? Wouldn't you like to be a friend like Jonathan?

There is just one Friend in all the world who is a better Friend than Jonathan, and that is Jesus, the Friend of little children. He loves you, not because you are good, or kind, or brave, or loving, but just because you are *you*. He loves you when you are naughty, He loves you when you are sad, He loves you when you are glad, He loves you and He died for your sake. He loves you and He wants you for His very own. Will you choose Him as your Friend? Will you give Him your love in exchange for His?

WALLS.

They were a wall unto us both by night and by day.—1 Sam. xxv. 16.

"A WALL unto us." Don't you think that was rather a nice thing to be called? The shepherds of a very wealthy man called Nabal had been feeding their flocks in a wild, desolate region where they were exposed to danger from savage beasts and wild tribes, and when they returned home one of them told how King David's men had been "a wall" unto them by day and by night. He meant of course that the king's men had protected them continually and enabled them to feed their flocks in safety.

Now it is a splendid thing to be a wall—to help to keep away harm and hurt from those who are weaker than ourselves. That is what our brave sailors and soldiers do. They are a wall between us and our enemies. But you can all be walls too. I wonder how?

1. Well, first, you can be a wall *at home*. Perhaps you think that is what father and mother should be—that father is there to fight your battles with the world, and mother to protect and care for you. And that is true. But you can be a wall too. For what is

it that spoils a home? It is the little petty squabbles, the little worries and frets; and those are the things you can help to keep out.

It takes two to make a quarrel, you know, and if you refuse to quarrel then there will be one less in the house to squabble with. And if you keep a bright face when things go a bit wrong, it will help you to bear your own troubles and it will help others to bear theirs. So don't forget to be a wall at home.

2. And then you can be a wall *at school* and among your friends. Is there some boy or girl in your class who for no very good reason is unpopular? Perhaps they are not so well-dressed as the rest, perhaps they are stupid, or timid, or awkward, or shy, and the others are inclined to make fun of them and to despise them. There are boys and girls like that in every school and you can be a wall to them. You can befriend them and bring out the best that is in them.

Is there any boy or girl you know who is easily led away? You can be a wall to them. You can help to keep them straight. Many a boy and girl has gone astray just for the lack of a good friend to steady them.

3. And then you can be a wall to the weak and the poor and the oppressed and the lonely *in the world at large*. That is what Jesus was. He helped the weak to be strong, He freed the oppressed, He was a friend to the lonely. And Jesus still calls those who would follow Him to be walls to such as these. If you are strong, and young, and bright He asks you to use your

strength, and your youth, and your brightness to help those who are weak, and old, and sad.

Perhaps you think you can't do much because you are so little. But boys and girls can do a great deal—much more than they often think. The question is—"Do you want to be a helper or a hinderer?" Because, you know, there are really just two kinds of people in the world—the helpers and the hinderers—the people who build up walls, and the people who pull them down and leave them lying about for others to fall over.

There have been men and women who have been magnificent, strong walls to the weak and the oppressed—men such as William Wilberforce, who fought for the freedom of the slaves; women such as Elizabeth Fry, who took up the cause of the prisoners, and Florence Nightingale, who cared for the soldiers. They were like the splendid walls of a fortress. We may be just very plain, ordinary people; but if we cannot hope to be fortress walls perhaps we can be rough stone dykes, and that is better than being stumbling-stones.

GOD'S JEWEL-CASE.

Bound in the bundle of life (RVm "the living") with the Lord thy God.—1 Sam. xxv. 29.

WHERE do you keep you treasures? Have you a special "hidey hole" that nobody knows of but yourself? Have you a box with a real lock and key? Have you perhaps a cash-box, a miniature copy of the one in father's office? Or have you a little jewel-case with divisions and a velvet lining, exactly like the one in which mother keeps her brooches and rings?

I know you have *something*. For everybody has his or her special treasure holder. It may be anything from the foot of an old stocking to a magnificent fireproof steel safe with the latest chubb lock. But whatever it may be, you trust it to keep your treasures safe.

Have you ever seen the kind of bag in which an Oriental ties up his precious belongings? It is a very primitive safe indeed, for it is just a piece of woven silk, sometimes only a scrap of common yellow cotton. It is gathered up in the form of a bag and then it is carefully whipped round the neck with a length of string. If the owner wishes to make it more secure he puts a seal on the string. That is the Oriental purse or jewel-case. It is not unlike the bag you make

with your handkerchief when you gather wild fruit by the wayside and have no basket in which to carry it home.

That Eastern bag or bundle is our text this morning. For when Abigail wished that the soul of David might be "bound in the bundle of the living" with the Lord his God, she just meant that she wished his life might be in God's safe-keeping, like a precious jewel safely stored.

Some wise people tell us that there was an ancient belief that the soul could be separated from the body and locked up safely at home while its owner was abroad. Perhaps the Hebrews held this belief and gave their soul into the safe keeping of God. That would explain Abigail's remark when she wished that David's soul might be kept in God's jewel-case.

Now we don't believe that we can lock up our soul at home when we go out. We know that wherever we go our soul goes with us. And yet we can give our soul to God to keep. That sounds impossible. How can we both carry our soul with us, and give it to God to keep? Shall I tell you how we can do it? You know that God is everywhere. Wherever we go, God is there. Well, if God is everywhere we go, and if we carry our soul everywhere we go, it stands to reason that wherever our soul may be God is. And so, if God is where our soul is, He can watch over it, He can take care of it for us.

An English poet, who wrote many fine verses, which

I hope you may read one day, wrote at the end of a well-known poem which is often sung as a song:

> I am the master of my fate,
> I am the captain of my soul.

He meant that he had thorough command and control of his own soul, and so he feared nothing that could happen to him. It was a fine idea, but the poem would have been still finer and nobler had Henley been able to write:

> *God* is the Master of my fate,
> *God* is the Captain of my soul.

Wise man as he was, he was not so wise as the little child whom a gentleman overtook one dark night as he hurried home through the streets of a great city. The little thing slipped her hand confidingly into his, and when he glanced down at her he was surprised to discover that she was a mite of five whom he knew.

"Why, child!" he exclaimed, "what are you doing here all by yourself? Is your father not with you?"

"No," she said.

"But aren't you afraid, dear?"

"Afraid!" she replied. "Oh, no! You see, God is everywhere, and He takes care of me."

Yes, God is everywhere, and God will let no harm befall our soul, if—if—and this is so important that it requires three underlinings—*if we put our soul in His charge.*

We can refuse to have any captain of our soul but self. We can even choose Satan as its master. We

can, if we like, entrust it to his keeping. The choice is ours. God leaves us free.

But I'll tell you this. It is only in God's "bundle of the living" that our soul will be safe.

And I'll tell you this, besides. If our soul is bound up in God's "bundle of the living" it is bound up also in God's bundle of eternal life. God will not only watch over our soul here; He will take it to live with Him forever in a life so wonderful, so happy, that we cannot even imagine how glorious it will be.

A FOOL'S CAP

I have played the fool.—1 Sam. xxvi. 21.
Fools for Christ's sake.—1 Cor. iv. 10.

LONG ago, there used to hang in my bedroom prints of two pictures by the famous artist Sir David Wilkie. They were both pictures of a schoolroom, but they were very different pictures. In the first the schoolmaster was present and all the boys were looking exceedingly busy over their tasks. In the second the master was absent and the boys were having a high old time.

There was one boy who always used to attract my attention—the boy with the fool's cap. He was the dunce of the class and he was sitting in the background wearing a tall cone-shaped paper cap and looking very cross. Nowadays boys are not punished in that way. If they don't know their lessons they get a caning, or are kept after hours, or have so many lines to write. But I'm not sure that the fool's cap wasn't rather a good idea after all; for the boy who won't learn his lessons is a bit of a fool. He is punishing himself more than anybody else and will have to pay for his laziness later. He well deserves to wear the fool's cap.

But what would you say supposing I told you that we all have to wear the fool's cap? And yet that is

true. We can't get away from being fools however hard we try. The question is which kind of fool are we going to be?

The Bible has quite a lot to say about fools, but in the main there are just two kinds—the unwise fool and the wise fool. The first is the man who lives for himself and who gives up everything for sin and selfish gratification; the second is the man who lives for others and who gives up everything for Christ and righteousness' sake.

I want to speak to-day about two men in the Bible who owned that they were fools. One of them was a foolish fool, the other was a wise fool. The first man's name was Saul—Saul the first king of Israel.

Saul began life well. He was a fine man, head and shoulders above all the people. He was clever and brave and chivalrous, and seemed "every inch a king." But he had one big fault—he had no self-control. He allowed pride and self-will and envy to master him, and they led him on to ruin. It was because he lost control of himself that he forfeited his kingship. It was because he allowed the wicked passion of jealousy to master him that he tried to kill David and even his own son Jonathan. And near the end of his life, when he looked back in one of his better moments on the way sin had led him, he cried out in bitter remorse, "Behold, I have played the fool, and have erred exceedingly."

Sooner or later sin makes fools of us all as it did of

King Saul. Often it looks very fair and pleasant at first, but that is just a way it has. If we saw it in all its ugliness we should not be so ready to follow it. There is a proverb which says "Sin begins like a spider's web, and ends like a cart-rope." It begins by binding us with a tiny thread which a baby could break, but it ends by making slaves of us.

And so any boy or girl who is allowing bad temper, or love of self, or love of ease, or any other fault to get the better of them is just playing the fool. Anyone who is allowing himself to be led away by bad companions is just playing the fool. And when sin has got us to play the fool it sits down and laughs at us and lets us pay the consequences.

The other man I want to talk about was also called Saul, though his name was afterwards changed to Paul. But he was a very different kind of man from King Saul.

Saul of Tarsus began life as a Pharisee. He, too, was a young man of brilliant gifts, and all his friends prophesied great things of him. He was likely to rise to great esteem among the Pharisees and already he was a zealous persecutor of the Christians. But one day, on the road to Damascus, Saul met Jesus of Nazareth, and from that day he became a "fool for Christ's sake." He gave up his brilliant prospects. He gave up his comforts and his home to become a poor travelling missionary. Instead of persecuting he was persecuted. He had to work hard to keep himself.

Often he was hungry and thirsty, sometimes he was beaten, many times he was mocked at, and in the end he laid down his life for Christ's sake. Again and again his old friends among the Pharisees must have said, "What a fool that young Saul is!"

But I think if you were asked to-day which was the greater fool—Saul of Tarsus, or Paul the Apostle—you would have no hesitation in answering. If Paul had remained a Pharisee we should scarcely have heard of him. As it is, he is known as the greatest Christian missionary. He did the grandest and noblest work that any man can do. He gave up much, but he gained things far more precious—the love and fellowship of Christ and a crown everlasting.

I want to tell you about two men who, like Paul, became "fools for Christ's sake."

The first is Antony Ashley Cooper, Earl of Shaftesbury. When he was a boy of fourteen or fifteen Shaftesbury was so impressed with the miseries of the poor that he resolved to devote his life to the cause of the poor and the friendless. When he grew up he entered Parliament, and from that time till the day of his death he espoused the cause of the oppressed, and especially of the poor children of England. Many a hard battle he fought in Parliament and out of it. Many an unpopular cause he took up. He fought for the over-worked factory hands, for the little children working in the mines, for the poor little boys who were sent up the chimneys to sweep them, and for

many other oppressed people. He was often bitterly opposed but that did not seem to matter to him; he just held right on till people came round to his way of thinking.

But not only did he plead the cause of the poor; he gave his money and his time and himself to their service. In those days the slums of London were very terrible places, where many dark deeds were done. But Lord Shaftesbury had no fear. He went in and out among the people. He encouraged them and helped them and loved them, until they came to love him in return. They looked upon him as a father and called him "our Earl"; and when he died rich and poor alike mourned for him as for their dearest friend.

Perhaps some of his friends may have called Lord Shaftesbury a fool to trouble himself about these people, but Britain would have been a great deal worse off and a great deal more miserable to-day if it had not been for his folly.

The other man I want to speak of is Father Damien. Father Damien was a young Belgian priest who heard of the awful misery that existed among a colony of lepers on the island of Molokai and devoted his life to working among them. When he arrived at the island he found that not only were the lepers suffering from an awful and loathsome disease, but they were living as little better than beasts. The young priest set to work to improve things. Not only did he nurse the lepers, but he built them better houses, he gave them a better water-supply, he loved them and he told

them of God's love. And so from being little better than criminals the people came to be a self-respecting colony and children of God.

By and by Father Damien caught the terrible disease, and although he might have been cured by leaving the island, he would not desert the people he had loved and helped, and in the end he diėd. Some people might say that Father Damien was a fool, and that he could have found good work to do elsewhere. But surely he was a very grand kind of fool, the kind we might all wish to become.

One word more. When the great European War broke out, Lord Kitchener called for men, and from workshop and office and university men came at his call and at the call of duty and righteousness. Many of them gave up brilliant careers or good businesses; all of them took their lives in their hands. The world might call them fools. Yes, but they were glorious fools. Many of them laid down their lives that we who were too young or too old or too weak to fight might live.

Boys and girls what are you going to do with these lives of yours that they have paid for with their lives? The future of England lies with you, and Christ has need of His soldiers too. Are you just going to "play the fool" and squander your lives away; or will you, with all the noble soldiers of Jesus Christ, become "fools for Christ's sake"?

PAYING YOUR DEBTS.

The men of Jabesh-gilead were they that buried Saul.—2 Sam. ii. 4.

THIS seems a queer text, doesn't it? Perhaps you wonder what it has to do with you and me. But you see it is only the end of a story, and for the beginning of it we must go back many years—right back to the commencement of King Saul's reign.

In those days the men of Jabesh-gilead weren't at all brave; in fact they showed themselves rather cowardly and servile.

Their enemies, the fierce Ammonites, came up and surrounded their city. By and by the people of Jabesh were worn out with the siege and they began to get badly frightened. They were afraid of what would happen to them if they fell into the hands of their enemies, and they sent messengers to the Ammonites, saying, "Make terms with us and we will serve you."

What do you think the answer was? "On one condition only will we treat with you—on the condition that we put out the right eye of every one of you and that the disgrace of it be laid to the account of all Israel who have not come to your aid."

Somewhere in the hearts of the people of Jabesh-gilead there must have been a spark of courage left.

And that cruel reply fanned it into flame. They were not going to lose their eyes without making a big effort, they were not going to bring disgrace upon all Israel without making a last attempt to remedy matters. They asked for seven days' respite in which they were to be allowed to send messages into all parts of Israel. Then if their fellow-countrymen refused indeed to come to their aid, they would give themselves into the hands of the Ammonites.

So the messengers went through all the land of Israel, and they came, among other places, to Gibeah, where Saul lived. Saul was not at home when they arrived; he was out in the fields ploughing, for, as you know, he was a farmer. And when the people of Gibeah received the message, what do you suppose they did? They sat down and cried just like a lot of babies. They wept and they wailed, they wrung their hands, and they made a most awful noise.

Well, you know, sitting down and crying about a thing never mended matters and never will. Presently Saul returned from his day's work and when he heard the din he said, "What in all the world is the row about?" Then somebody told him the story of the men of Jabesh-gilead. And when Saul heard it he grew hot with righteous wrath. *He* didn't sit down and cry about it. He began to act.

First he slew a yoke of oxen and cut them in pieces. Then he sent the pieces by messengers through all the land of Israel just as the Highlanders of Scotland used to send the fiery cross from hand to hand to gather

the members of their clans. And with the messengers he sent a message—"Whosoever cometh not forth after Saul and after Samuel, so shall it be done unto his oxen."

The effect was wonderful. In a very short time he had gathered together an army of three hundred and thirty thousand men. They marched upon Jabesh-gilead and fell upon the Ammonites in the early morning, surprising and utterly routing them.

So the men of Jabesh-gilead were delivered.

But that is not all the story. Many years afterwards Saul was defeated in battle by the Philistines. Three of his sons were killed. He himself was sorely wounded, and rather than fall into the hands of the enemy he took his own life.

The following day the Philistines found the bodies of Saul and of his sons on the battlefield. They stripped the king of his armour and cut off his head. His armour they put in the house of one of their gods, his head in the temple of another, while his body and that of his sons they hung upon the wall of one of their fortified cities—Beth-shan.

Now Beth-shan was on the opposite side of the Jordan from Jabesh-gilead and distant from it less than twenty miles. And when it came to the ears of the men of Jabesh how the Philistines had insulted their king, all the valiant men among them arose and set out at dead of night to rescue the bodies. It was a hazardous business, but they did not hesitate.

All night they went, and before dawn they reached

the hill on which stood the city. They climbed the steep rock to the wall, rescued the bodies, and carried them back to Jabesh-gilead. There they buried them under a sacred tree.

So the men of Jabesh paid their debt. They forgot Saul's mistakes, they forgot his faults, they remembered only that he had once helped them when they were in sore straits, and they risked their lives to save his body from disgrace.

I want to tell you another story, boys and girls. It is a little story that is told in the life of one of the first and best of hospital nurses—Sister Dora—and it happened half a century ago.

In those days surgeons did not know so well as they do now how to save a badly injured arm or leg. The usual cure was—"Take it off."

One day a young man was brought into the hospital where Sister Dora was working. His arm had been badly twisted and torn by machinery and the surgeon gave his verdict that, in order to save the patient's life, he must amputate the limb.

The young man was greatly distressed. It was his right arm and without it he would be very helpless. Sister Dora examined the limb and then she said to the surgeon, "I believe I can save this arm if you will let me try."

The surgeon was very angry, but finally he consented. "But remember it's your arm," he said, "I wash my hands of the case."

Sister Dora did save the arm, and at hospital the man received the nickname of "Sister's arm."

Some time later Sister Dora herself fell ill and this same man walked eleven miles to ask for her every Sunday—his only free day.

He used to pull the bell very hard and when the servant appeared he would anxiously inquire, "How's Sister?" And always before he went away, he would say, "Tell her that's *her* arm that rang the bell."

How many of you can find a connection between these two stories? It is just this. In both cases they tell of people who remembered and who paid their debt as best they could. Do we?

Do we pay our debts to our father and mother, to God? I think sometimes it isn't that we forget or mean to be ungrateful; it is just that we don't think. We are so accustomed to the benefits and kindnesses that are showered upon us that we don't realize how big they are or how numerous.

Will you try to begin to think to-day? Above all, will you try to remember that, far more than that man had the right to be called "Sister's arm," you have the right to be called "Jesus' boy" or "Jesus' girl," for He died to save you. Are you ready to acknowledge that? Are you ready to pay your debt to Him?

GOD'S DWELLING-PLACE.

The ark of the Lord remained in the house of Obed-edom the Gittite three months: and the Lord blessed Obed-edom, and all his house.—2 Sam. vi. 11.

To-day I want to tell you the story of a box or chest—a very wonderful chest indeed. Even to look at it was wonderful, for though it was made of acacia, or what the Bible calls "shittim," wood it was plated all over with gold. On the top of the chest rested a solid slab of gold which had a beautiful name of its own. It was called the Mercy Seat. At each end of this Mercy Seat was a winged figure called a cherubim and between these two figures, when the chest was put in its proper place, there rested a mysterious light. That light was the sign, the token, of the presence of God. Inside the chest were the "tables of stone" which Moses brought down from Mount Sinai, tablets on which were written the ten commandments given to him by God. This chest, or "ark" as the Bible names it, was the most sacred and cherished possession of the children of Israel, and it was carried from place to place with great care, according as God commanded.

Several very remarkable things occurred in its history. When the priests bore it to the brink of the

river Jordan, the waters were divided before it and they kept divided so long as the ark rested in the river bed. It was carried round the city of Jericho seven days in succession, and on the last day the walls fell flat, and the Israelites entered the city without opposition.

The ark was afterwards placed in Shiloh, and there a strange adventure befell it. It was taken into the midst of the camp of Israel when they were about to fight with the Philistines. The battle was fought, Israel was beaten, and the ark was taken captive. The Philistines carried it off and set it up in the temple of Dagon, their fish-god. "Now," said they, "by this we proclaim that Jehovah, Israel's God, is the conquered prisoner of our god." But the morning showed Dagon lying broken on the threshold. The frightened priests got rid of the ark as quickly as they could. From one Philistine city to another it passed, and everywhere its presence was marked by disease and calamity. So at last they huddled it into a cart and left the oxen to draw it whither they would. The animals made straight for the hills of Judæa, and rested in a harvest field of Beth-shemesh.

The ark was then left for a time at Kirjath-jearim, till David thought of bringing it to Zion. But, awe-struck by the death of Uzzah, who rashly put out his hand to touch it, David ordered it to be carried into the house of a very good man called Obed-edom, where it remained three months. And all the time it was there, a blessing rested with it. There were no idols in Obed-edom's house, and he was not presumptuous like Uzzah.

He feared and served the God of the ark; so, instead of being a source of disaster, it was a blessing to him.

Would you like to know the rest of the story? After the ark had rested three months in Obed-edom's house it was safely removed to a special tent which King David had erected for it in Zion, that is, Jerusalem. David wanted to build a temple to be a fitting home for the ark, but God asked him to leave that to his successor. And so, when Solomon came to the throne, he erected a magnificent Temple and there the ark was placed in state. What really was the end of it we shall probably never know, but most people suppose that when Jerusalem and its Temple were destroyed by Nebuchadrezzar, the king of Babylon, the ark was destroyed too.

Now I don't want you to think of the sad end of the ark. I want you to think of it as our text speaks of it, resting in the house of Obed-edom. Don't you think Obed-edom must have been very proud, and very awed at the same time, to think that the dwelling-place of the great God of Israel should be in his house? For Obed-edom, like the Israelites of his day, would believe that God came down and dwelt specially between the outstretched wings of the cherubim. But he would not understand what his countrymen were to learn later, and what you and I know to-day—that God loves to dwell in *every* house and in *every* place where He is invited to come.

That reminds me of a story I read the other day. Some years ago there lived in one of the central states

of America a certain farmer who had a wife and two children, a baby boy and a little girl of seven. He was not making a success of his farm, and when the great north-west country was opened up he resolved to move there and begin afresh. So he went off and secured a farm in a very lonely out-of-the-way spot. When he came home and told his little girl what he had done, her first question was, "Is there any church there, Dad?" (She was fond of church, you see.) Dad said, "No." "Is there any Sunday school there?" inquired she. Again Dad said, "No." Then, "Is there any God there?" she asked. And Dad didn't know what to say to that, so he answered nothing.

When they had moved all the furniture out of the old home and were ready to start for the train, the child was nowhere to be found. They hunted high and low, and at last her mother found her. Do you know where? In her own little empty room, kneeling in one corner with her face to the wall. She was praying aloud, and this is what she was saying—"Dear God, we are going to North Dakota and there is no Sunday school there, and there is no church there, and there is no God there. Good-bye, dear God, good-bye."

Poor little lassie! Her heart was nearly broken because she did not understand that God dwells wherever He is invited to dwell. She did not know that His favourite dwelling-place is the loving heart of just such a little child.

Perhaps you would like to hear the end of that story. It has a happier ending than the story of the ark.

When the little girl's mother overheard the prayer she knelt down beside the child and asked God to send the Sunday school and the church to their new home, and to go with them Himself. And do you know what happened? Within two months a Sunday school missionary started a Sunday school in that place; and within five months a little church was opened, and the neighbours for miles round came there to worship God.

God, boys and girls, never refuses an invitation to come and stay. And where He comes He blesses as He blessed Obed-edom. Have you ever sent Him an invitation? Have you invited Him to your home? Have you asked Him to dwell in your heart?

A PROMISE AND HOW IT WAS KEPT.

Thou shalt not cut off thy kindness from my house for ever.—1 Sam. xx. 15.

I will surely shew thee kindness for Jonathan thy father's sake.—2 Sam. ix. 7.

ONCE upon a time there were two young men who were fast friends. They loved each other as perhaps no two friends have ever done before or since. One of them was a prince, the other had been a shepherd and a soldier and he was now an outlaw. For the king, the prince's father, did not love him as the prince did. It had come to his knowledge that one day this young shepherd-soldier would sit on the throne, and he was very jealous. He was so jealous that he tried to take the young man's life, and the youth had to flee from him.

So the time came when the prince and the soldier must part. The prince must stay beside his father, for that was his duty, but the soldier must hide himself among the hills so that the king might not find him.

The two friends were very, very sad, and very, very sorry; and because they were so sad and sorry, and because they loved each other so much, they made a vow one with another. The prince knew that some day the

soldier would come to the throne, that he would take the place that was really his. Unlike his father, he was not a bit jealous. He loved his friend so much that he was glad when anything good happened to him. But he made him promise that he would never forget him. And the soldier promised that, whatever happened, he would always show kindness to the prince and to his sons and grandsons who should come after him. So they parted.

By and by God sent the prince a little son, and the prince gave him a queer long name. He called him Mephibosheth.

For the first five years of his life little Mephibosheth had a very happy time. He lived in a palace and was very much petted and adored. And he was quite sure that nobody had such a splendid daddy as he. For Mephibosheth loved and admired his father tremendously. Who was so brave, or so handsome, or so good? He liked to see him dressed in his beautiful shining armour and wearing on his face such a brave, stern look: for daddy went a great deal to war in those days. But best of all he loved the quiet evenings when there was no fighting and daddy lifted him on his knees before bedtime and told him stories of the great battles of long ago.

There was one story he liked specially to hear. It was the tale of how the young shepherd boy who was daddy's greatest friend fought the big giant who was frightening all the famous warriors of his land. Often and often the prince spoke about this friend. He used

to tell how brave he was, and how loving and kind. And sometimes his voice would grow husky, and something that was warm and wet would fall on Mephibosheth's brow. Then the little boy would put up his hand and stroke his father's face and say, "Don't cry, Daddy: I love you too."

There was one thing that the prince repeated over and over again: "If ever you are in trouble, Mephibosheth, and I am away, you must go to this friend. He will help you and be kind to you for he has promised. *And he never breaks his promise.*"

When Mephibosheth was just five years old there came a very sad morning when daddy came in all dressed in his shining armour and told his little son that he was going away to fight grandfather's enemies. I think he must have known he would never come back, for his face looked so sad, and he kissed Mephibosheth long and tenderly and told him always to be a good boy.

That evening there was terrible excitement in the palace. Messengers came rushing in bearing very bad news. There had been a great battle and the king's army had been defeated. The king was killed, and the brave prince, and other two of the king's sons. And the enemy were in pursuit. They would soon reach the palace, and they would kill everyone they found there. The women and children must flee for their lives.

In terror, Mephibosheth's nurse caught him up in her arms, set him on her shoulder, and ran with him

as fast as she could away from the palace. And as she ran she tripped and fell. The boy was dashed violently against some stones, and his feet were injured. Oh how they hurt! After that he didn't quite know what happened. Somebody picked him up and ran on and on with him, on and on across a river, on and on till they came to a farm among the hills, where a kind farmer offered to take care of the king's grandson.

When Mephibosheth came to himself he discovered a very sad thing—he was lame in both his feet! He would never be able to run and play like other boys: he would always be a helpless cripple. Besides that his dear daddy was dead. He would never see him again. Don't you think he must have been a very sad and sorry little boy that day?

There was another thing that made him sad. Always his friends kept saying that they must hide him from David. David was the new king who sat on grandfather's throne; and if David knew there was such a person as Mephibosheth he would want to kill him, they said. For it often happened in those cruel days that the new king put to death all the relatives of the old king.

Mephibosheth was puzzled. "David!" Wasn't that the name of daddy's great friend—the brave shepherd who slew the giant? And daddy had told him to go to David if he was in trouble. Yet they said David wanted to kill him. It was all very queer. Of course he couldn't go to David now because of his poor lame feet, and nobody would take him. And by and by he

began to half believe the things these friends of his grandfather told him. You see he was very little, and daddy was dead, and there was no one to tell him anything better.

So the years passed until Mephibosheth had grown to be a man and was married and had a little boy of his own.

Then one evening, away in his palace in Jerusalem, King David sat thinking about the long ago days when he was a young man. He had been very busy fighting the enemies of his country since he came to the throne, but now the land was at peace and he had time to think. His mind went back to the day when he had fought the giant, to the days when he had lived in King Saul's palace, to the days when he had wandered as an outlaw among the hills. And always in his thoughts there was the remembrance of a friend who had been true and unselfish and loyal, a friend who would have laid down his life for him.

One scene especially came back to his memory. It was a scene in a field where this friend, on the eve of their parting, made him promise a solemn promise—that he would be kind to him and to his children for ever.

And David cried out with a great longing—"Is there yet any that is left of the house of Saul, that I may shew him kindness for Jonathan's sake?"

Now some of his servants overheard him and they said, "There is here an old servant of Saul called Ziba. He knows something about Saul's descendants." So

David sent for Ziba and when the servant was brought into his presence he repeated his question.

The old man replied that Jonathan had a son called Mephibosheth who was lame in both his feet and that he was living with a farmer away across the Jordan. Can't you imagine how glad David was when he heard that? Jonathan had a son still alive, and he had never known!

He sent at once to fetch him. And when Mephibosheth was brought into the king's presence he threw himself down at his feet and made himself very humble. You see he had been told nearly all his life that David wanted to kill him, and he may have been afraid that David had just sent for him to put him to death.

But the king raised him up and spoke very kindly to him. He told him not to fear, for he would surely show him kindness for Jonathan his father's sake. He told him also that he would give him all the land that had belonged to his grandfather Saul, and that he would lend him Ziba and his fifteen sons to be his servants. They would till the land for him so that he need never want. Finally he said that always Mephibosheth was to sit at the king's table and take his place among the king's sons.

Don't you think Mephibosheth must have felt proud and glad that day? And don't you think that David kept that old, old promise splendidly?

Why have I told you this story to-day? Because I want you, like David, to remember that a promise, a

solemn promise, is a sacred thing, and that it ought to be kept.

There was a little boy once who was asked what the word "promise" meant; and he replied, "To promise is to keep it in your mind, keep it in your mind, keep it in your mind, *till you do it.*" Don't you think that was a splendid answer? Sometimes it is years, as it was in David's case, before we can fulfil our promise, but we must "keep it in our mind," until at last we are able to do it.

Away up in the north of Scotland there is a little footbridge over a mountain stream, and on the central stone of the bridge there is a curious inscription. It consists of just three words—"God and me." Would you like to know the story of that bridge?

In the summertime the stream is often a mere trickle of water, but in spring, when the snows melt on the hills, it becomes a raging torrent. Once when this burn was "in spate," as we say in Scotland, a little girl attempted to cross it. She attempted to cross, and she fell in and was in danger of drowning. She prayed to God to help her, and she promised that if He would save her then she would build a bridge over the stream. Well, God did help her and she got safely across to the other side.

She was just a poor girl, but after a while she went to work. And she never forgot her promise. Little by little she gathered her pennies until before she died she had saved enough to build the bridge. And she put on it that beautiful motto—"God and me."

Boys and girls, try always to make promises that are good and worthy. And when you have made them, remember that they are not things to be tossed aside lightly. They are binding and sacred; and we must keep them in our mind, keep them in our mind, keep them in our mind, *till we fulfil them.*

PLAYING THE MAN.

Let us play the men.—2 Sam. x. 12.

JOAB, the commander-in-chief of David's army, found himself in a tight corner. He had been sent by King David to lay siege to Rabbah, the capital of Ammon. But when he approached Rabbah the Ammonites came out to fight him, and the Syrians, whom the King of Ammon had hired to help him, closed in behind him. There he was, shut in between two armies, his retreat cut off in both directions. What was he to do? Well, the only course was to face the situation and make the best of it. He must divide his army in two, and fight both enemies at once.

The Syrians were the more formidable foe, so he resolved to face them himself; and for this purpose he chose out the doughtiest of the warriors—men tried in many a fight like Napoleon's "Old Guard." The rest of the army he put under the command of Abishai his brother, with injunctions that, if the Syrians proved too strong, Abishai was to come to his aid, and if the Ammonites proved too strong, he was to go to Abishai's aid.

As they parted Joab gave a few last words of encouragement—the best that any general could give

to his officers or men on going into action—"Be of good courage, and let us play the men for our people, and for the cities of our God: and the Lord do that which seemeth him good."

We know how the battle ended—how the Syrians did not wait to fight, but turned and fled before the terrible onslaught of these determined warriors; and how the Ammonites, seeing their allies routed, retired hastily within the walls of their city.

"Let us play the men." That is surely the best motto any boy can take. If he lives up to it and all that it means he has not lived in vain. If he lives up to it, he is taking his place among the heroes of the world.

"Let us play the men." What does it mean? Well it does *not* mean "let us play at being a man." You can play at being a man when you smoke cigarettes, and speak in a gruff voice, and swagger a cane. But that is not "playing the man."

No, "playing the man" means something far grander and bigger and more worth while. It means rising to the best that is in us, rising to all we were meant to be when God created man in His image. It means being brave and honourable and self-controlled.

Playing the man means conquering ourselves, and conquering our circumstances.

First it means *conquering ourselves.* There is no use blinking the fact that we have all got within us something that can make us less than man, but something that, if grappled with and conquered, can make us more

than man. We have all got within us a bit of the beast. You can hear the bear growling sometimes, you can see the tiger's claws, you can watch the pig wallowing, and the peacock strutting.

Now it is the business of all of us to tame and control that beast. And be very sure of this, *unless you are going to control him, he is going to control you.* We don't allow wild beasts to roam about our houses and lie down under our tables. We chain them up, and put them in cages. Chain up your wild beasts.

It is going to be a tough job, but it will make a man of you. You will have a harder task even than Joab had. He had enemies on all sides, but we are not told that he had any deserters or traitors within. Not only have you enemies without, but you have traitors and deserters within. Your courage will sometimes play you false, your resolution will desert you. But what of that? The true hero is the man who persists though the odds be greatly against him, the man who faces the fight even though he be afraid.

Do you know the story of Derar, a brave warrior who was one of Mohammed's followers? In the year 633 Mohammed's followers were at war with the Roman Empire, and one day in battle Derar found himself face to face with thirty soldiers — thirty soldiers whom he had to fight alone. Before help could come he had killed or unhorsed seventeen of those thirty men. When he was asked afterwards why he

had not run away, he replied, "I was afraid that God would see me turn my back." That is the only thing that a man need fear—that God should see him turn his back. "Be of good courage," then; let us fight the beast, let us fight for our manhood, "let us play the men."

Secondly "playing the man" means *conquering circumstances.* Sometimes you hear people saying that "circumstances" were too strong for them. Such a statement is generally a whining excuse for moral weakness. There are some things that we cannot alter in this world: we have just to take them as they are and make the best of them. But taking circumstances as they are and making the best of them doesn't mean that the circumstances have got the better of us. It means that we have got the better of the circumstances, and that is a very different thing.

Let us suppose that an officer is ordered to a lonely outpost on the Indian frontier. There are two ways he could meet the situation. He could make a fuss about it and grumble at his hard luck—I don't say he does, for that is not the sort of thing a soldier does, but he *could* do it. He could grumble, and do his work with half a heart, and make those around him thoroughly miserable. What would be the consequence? His work would suffer, and the likelihood is that he would be kept at that lonely outpost for some considerable time or be sent to a worse one. On the other hand he could throw his whole heart and soul into the work and determine to make the best of

things. Promotion to a better billet would probably follow, but in any case the man would gain in self-control and manliness. He would get the better of his circumstances by getting the best out of them. He would "play the man."

Playing the man means "sticking in." It means facing up to our tasks cheerfully. It means meeting disappointments and disagreeable things without whining. It means persevering when we are like to be beaten. It means grappling with our difficulties till we overcome them. It means independence — not following the crowd, if the crowd are wrong.

You are going to grow up one of these days. Are you going to be men, or are you going to be puppets whom anyone can move if they pull the right string? You are determining that now. There are some boys who would fight you if you destroyed their cricket bat or broke their best knife, but who would sit down calmly and let another boy destroy what is far more precious —their moral well-being—without lifting a finger to interfere.

Boys, God wants men. He is badly in need of them in this world. He wants men and He makes men. The best Man who ever lived was also the greatest Hero. He overcame the beast, He suffered poverty and hardship uncomplainingly, He went unflinchingly to a cruel death from which His whole flesh shrank, He bore a burden which bowed Him to the very dust and broke His heart.

Most of you have got your heroes whom you admire and secretly try to imitate. Don't forget to include in the list the greatest Hero of all; and if you strive to imitate Him you will also become a hero, or—what is even greater than a hero—a man.

ABSALOM.

In all Israel there was none to be so much praised as Absalom for his beauty: from the sole of his foot even to the crown of his head there was no blemish in him.—2 Sam. xiv. 25.

To-day we are going to talk about someone who was a prince—we are none of us that! Someone who was splendidly and perfectly beautiful, are—any of us that? Someone who had a particularly charming manner—and most of us would be none the worse of that! Someone who was utterly spoiled—*of course* none of us are that! Someone who was vainer than a peacock—equally of course none of us are *that*!

Have you guessed the name of this someone who was so like—I beg your pardon, unlike—ourselves? If I give you two more hints, perhaps you will be able to tell me his name. First, he was famous for his beautiful hair; second, his name began with an "A." Yes. It was Prince Absalom.

The story of Absalom makes one feel sad, for he could have been such a splendid success, and all he succeeded in being was a miserable failure. You remember he was not only the son of a king, but he was the son of a king's daughter, and he was the heir to the throne of Israel. He was brave and fearless too, and his handsome face and winning manners

made him the idol of the court. To see him was to admire him.

But Absalom had one great fault, and it was just the fault you would have expected such a young man to have—he was full of conceit. By and by this vanity grew so great that it choked out all his virtues as a strong weed chokes out tender flowers. By and by it, this same vanity, led even to his death.

Absalom was not altogether to blame for his conceit. His father David was partly responsible. For David had never found fault with the boy. David had petted him and spoiled him and given him everything he wanted, except the one thing he most required—a touch of the birch-rod.

And so Absalom, this petted child of fortune, this darling of the people, grew up to bring nothing but sorrow to his father's heart. First he slew his own brother. Then he plotted to seize his father's crown. He was not content with being heir to the throne, he wanted to fill it immediately, partly because his vanity told him he would fill it extremely well, partly because his vanity was hurt at his father's having banished him from court for a few years as a punishment for having slain his brother.

He set about the matter in a very clever and cunning fashion. He flattered the foolish people till he had won them over to his side. Then he seized Jerusalem and his poor old father had to flee from the city with the few who were faithful to him.

Absalom was very near indeed to the throne that

day he entered Jerusalem, but he lost the throne and his life as well—all because of his vanity. He held a council of his followers as to what his next step should be. One man, named Ahithophel, advised that Absalom should let him and a picked number of men go at once in pursuit of the king, that they might slay him while he was weak and weary with the flight, and before he had time to gather round him sufficient men to oppose his son. But another man, Hushai, who was really David's friend, and who knew Absalom's weak point, advised Absalom to wait till he had gathered together all his admirers and followers in Israel. Hushai told Absalom how magnificent he would look at the head of that great multitude and what a splendid show it would be. And Absalom could not resist such an idea as that. He took Hushai's advice.

Then, of course, while Absalom was taking time to gather together all these followers, David had time to collect his men, and he also had time to choose the ground where the battle should be.

It took place in a wooded country and the story says that the wood "devoured more people that day than the sword," for Absalom's men were accustomed to fight in the bare open country, and David's followers knew the woods. Absalom's men got lost and bewildered among the trees, and they fell down the crevices between the rocks, crevices which were filled with brushwood and shrubs. They were altogether beaten, and Absalom himself fled on one of the royal mules. He fled in haste through a part of the wood,

and there a terrible thing happened. Perhaps he was looking over his shoulder to see if his pursuers were gaining on him, at any rate he did not notice where he was going, and he caught his head in the branch of an oak. His mule sped from under him, and there he was left hanging between heaven and earth. Some people think that his long hair became entangled in the branches, and that the more he struggled to free himself the more he became imprisoned.

And as he was hanging there helpless, a certain man, perhaps one of those from whom the prince was fleeing, saw him and ran and told Joab, one of the three generals on David's side. And Joab, although David had given him and his brother generals strict orders to spare Absalom's life, said to himself, "Here's a chance to get rid of a traitor and a troubler of the peace!" And he went to the tree and stabbed Absalom as he hung there. Then ten of his men-at-arms finished the horrible job. They hacked Absalom with their swords, and cast his body into a pit over which they piled a heap of stones. It was adding insult to injury, for that was a burial which the Hebrews thought specially insulting. Everyone who passed that way was supposed to add a stone to the heap. It was as if they cast a stone at the evil-doer himself.

And perhaps the saddest part of it all was that no one really mourned for Absalom except the poor old father whom he had tried to kill. Vain people may have followers, they may have plenty who are ready

to toady to them and feed their vanity if they have a high position, but they have no real friends. How can they? When the heart of a man or woman, boy or girl, is entirely taken up with self how can he or she expect to have a friend? To have a friend you must have room in your heart for him.

Now, I think the story of Absalom needs nothing added to it. It is a sermon in itself. But I should just like to say this. If, boys and girls, you are ever tempted to be conceited about your person, or your possessions, or your brains, or anything that belongs to you, say to yourself two things. The first is, "Remember Absalom!" The second is, "Remember Christ!"

Christ also was the Son of a King. And all the Universe was His. Yet He came to earth a humble carpenter. And ever as He walked this earth He said over and over again, both in words and in deeds, that the greatest man is not the man who thinks himself great, but the man who is ready to be servant of all, not the man who is proud and haughty in spirit, but the man who is humble and lowly of heart.

Absalom or Christ!—Which will you follow? Which will you take for your model and your hero?

ACTING FERRY-BOAT.

There went over a ferry-boat to bring over the king's household.—2 Sam. xix. 18.

OUR text this morning is something which is mentioned only once in the Bible—a ferry-boat. This ferry-boat comes into one of the stories about King David. At the time of the story David was an old man and he had just been passing through a very trying experience. His son Absalom had plotted against him. He had tried to get himself made king in his father's stead. The plot had so far succeeded that David had had to flee from Jerusalem with his household and those who were faithful to him. He had crossed the Jordan, and there his men and Absalom's men had fought a fierce battle in which Absalom was slain and his followers were defeated.

But King David had not hurried back to Jerusalem to punish the rebels. He had waited on the other side of Jordan till his people repented and sent him a message entreating him to return to rule over them. Then it was that, when David reached the river Jordan on his return journey, he found waiting to welcome him the leading men of the tribe of Judah, also a man called Ziba who had been a servant of King Saul. This man had with him his fifteen sons and twenty

servants, and the story says that they went through Jordan—that is, forded the river—to meet the king, and that "there went over" also "a ferry-boat to bring over the king's household"—the women and children who had gone with him into exile.

Now great scholars who have studied the Hebrew language, in which this story was first written, tell us that they are not quite sure that the word translated "ferry-boat" means a ferry-boat. They say that "ferry-boat" may mean "ford" and that we should read that Ziba and his fifteen sons and his twenty servants dashed through Jordan in the presence of the king, and kept crossing and recrossing the ford to carry over the king's household.

But, after all, the change does not make much difference to the story, for, if Ziba and his sons and servants carried over the women and children belonging to the king, what were they but human ferry-boats? They took passengers safely across the river, and if that is not what a ferry-boat is for, tell me what you think it is for.

As it happens, I hope the text *does* refer to human ferry-boats, for that is what I want to ask you to be to-day—human ferry-boats. There are all kinds of ferry-boats, as you know. There are those which are rowed with oars; there are those like a punt which are worked by a pole; there are those which are pulled across with the aid of an overhead wire; and there are those which have sails. There are also the funny little paddle steamers which ferry you across

the larger rivers, and the fine big steam boats which take you over an estuary like the Mersey. But nature's ferry-boat, and the earliest ferry-boat known, is just some strong kind person who carries a weaker or smaller person across a river.

But, you say, how am I to act as a human ferry-boat? To begin with there is no river near my home, or, if there is, it is too wide and deep to ford, and I am too small to carry anybody across.

Well, you see, I was talking in parables. I did not mean a real live river; I meant the rivers which we all have to cross in life, the things that we have to get to the other side of *somehow*—things that we feel it is impossible for us to get over. They are the difficulties and dangers which we come to sooner or later in the journey of life. It is well for us if, when we do come to them, we meet there a kind human ferry-boat to help us over and land us safely on the other side.

I think that I don't need to explain the *difficulties* to you. They begin when we are very small indeed. They begin with things such as grammar we can't understand and sums that won't come out right; and as we grow older they go on to bigger things such as business worries and household cares. For all of them there is no better aid than the helping hand of a friend, a kind human ferry-boat.

The *dangers* are not so easy to describe or so easy to get over as the difficulties. Let us see if a story will help. There is a tale told of a famous Swiss scientist

called Louis Agassiz. When he was a boy he lived on the border of one of the beautiful Swiss lakes, and this lake used to freeze over in winter. Louis had a small brother much younger than himself, and he and his brother set off one day across the frozen lake to meet their father. Their mother was watching the two boys from the window, and to her horror she noticed that they had come to a crack in the ice. It was not wide—only about a foot or so—and the ice on each side of it was quite thick, but the mother was afraid that the little fellow would try to step across, would miss his footing, and plunge into the dark waters beneath.

But she need not have feared. When the boys reached the crack, what do you think happened? Louis got down on the ice on his hands and knees. He stretched himself cautiously across the crack, and his little brother walked safely over on a human bridge.

Children, there are places in life more dangerous than the Jordan river, more dangerous than the ice crack on the Swiss lake. When you see anyone doing what is dishonourable, or mean, or cowardly, or cruel, he is in one of those dangerous places; and he needs your help even more than if he were merely in difficulties. Are you going to turn your back on him, then, and let him drown? Or are you going to do your very utmost, the very best you know, to get him out of that danger? Are you going to be content only when you see him safe on the other side?

If you want a good reason why you should act ferry-boat, here it is. Christ went about acting ferry-boat all His days on earth. He was ever helping people out of difficulties, out of dangers. He was ever doing good.

THE GREATNESS OF GENTLENESS.

Thy gentleness hath made me great.—2 Sam. xxii. 36.

Don't you think this is rather a queer text? You would not have been surprised if David had said, "Thy strength hath made me great" or "Thy power hath made me great"; but when he says, "Thy gentleness hath made me great," you think he must somehow have got hold of things by the wrong end.

Well, if you look at the first verse of this chapter you will see that David sang this psalm, "in the day that the Lord delivered him out of the hand of all his enemies, and out of the hand of Saul." He was looking back on the difficult and dangerous times through which he had come; and he saw that it was God's care for him, the kind and loving way He had led him, that had made him the great man he was. Perhaps when he reached this verse in his song, David remembered the time when he had been a shepherd boy. Perhaps he was thinking of some little tired lamb that he had carried over the rough mountain-path, and he thought, "That is just the way God stooped down to me in my need, and lifted me up, and made me great and strong by His gentleness."

Now it is a little difficult for us to understand how

great a power gentleness is, so I want you to think about it for a little while to-day.

1. And we are going first to Mother Nature to see what she has to say about it. What do you think is the most powerful thing in Nature? Perhaps some of you will say an earthquake. An earthquake is certainly a very powerful thing, but what does it do? It makes great rents in the earth's surface, it knocks down houses and destroys life. But can it build up the houses it has knocked down, can it give back the life it has destroyed? Not once. Then lightning seems a very powerful thing, and so it is. But what does it do? It blasts great trees, but it cannot give them life. And a hurricane is a very strong thing. It tears up plants by the root, it knocks down trees and flies off with our slates and our chimney pots, but it cannot make one tiny wild-flower grow.

Now do you think it is greater to make things or to destroy them? Surely it is greater to make them. It is easy to tear a book into shreds, but it is not so easy to write another book. We could all destroy a toy or a doll, but how many of us could make one? And what is it that makes the flowers grow? The soft, warm rays of the sun, the gentle rain, the silent help of the soil underground. These are the most powerful things in Nature.

Perhaps it is because gentle things don't make a noise that we forget how great they are. Few things are greater and quieter than the growing of flowers and of boys and girls, the ripening of corn, or the coming of the dawn.

2. And just as gentleness is the greatest power in Nature, I think it is the greatest power in people too. If a friend flies into a rage with you, you will accomplish more by keeping calm and giving a gentle answer than by flying into a rage too.

Once upon a time a man arrived in a town with a monkey and a barrel-organ. The monkey wore a little red coat and a little red cap. He sat on the organ while the man played a tune, and afterwards he performed some tricks. One day a little dog came rushing out of one of the houses and flew at the monkey, barking and making a terrible noise. The monkey waited till the dog came quite near; then he took off his little red cap and made him a very polite bow. You should have seen that dog. He was so astonished and so ashamed that he just dropped his tail and sneaked off into the house without uttering another bark.

You will find that people will do much more for you if you are polite and gentle than if you are rough and rude. "Please" and "thank you," will always accomplish much more than grabbing.

Don't imagine that gentleness is a sign of "softness." It is a sign of strength. We can all be rough and cruel if we like, but it takes a strong, brave man to control a temper, and be kind to little helpless things.

There is a story told of General Lee who was the leading general on the Southern side in the American Civil War. One morning he was standing with some officers under a tree on a battlefield. A shell burst

near them, and the general said he thought they had better retire as the enemy had evidently got their range. Nobody moved till the commander should move, and the next shell crashed into the top of the tree. Then the officers took their leader's advice and began to retreat; but when they looked round the general was still under the tree. The shell had knocked down a bird's nest and he had stopped to pick it up and put it carefully on one of the lower branches. Although he was a great general he was not ashamed to take care of a little helpless bird.

3. And now we come back to the place where we began. It is God's gentleness, not the thought of His majesty or power, that makes us great. It is His love that draws us.

There is a legend of a knight who did not believe in God and who was always boasting of his unbelief and laughing and sneering at those who did believe. One day in a bragging mood he threw down his gauntlet, as knights used to do when they challenged each other to fight. And he said, "If there be a God, I challenge Him to come down and meet me in mortal combat." And while the people waited trembling, expecting to see a lightning flash strike the bold, proud knight to the ground, there came down from heaven a scroll of parchment on which were written these words, "God is love." That message broke down all the knight's pride and unbelief, and he was ever after the humble and loving servant of God.

God knows how foolish we are, and how far we can

wander, and how much we can hurt ourselves; and He just wants to put His arms round us and wrap us in His love, safe from all harm. He stoops down and takes us—poor, silly children, and He lifts us up and makes us strong, and wise, and tender. His gentleness makes us great.

JEWELS IN THE MUD.

The mire of the streets.—2 Sam. xxii. 43.

MIRE or mud from the streets! It doesn't sound as if it were of much value, does it? Except of course for the delightful business of making mud pies! But listen to what a famous writer and artist, called Ruskin, once said about it. He said that if you took an ounce or two of ordinary black slime from the footpath and had it analysed—that is, separated up into the different things of which it is composed—you would find that it was made up of four things—clay, sand, soot, and water.

Then, said Ruskin, suppose each of these were allowed to gather itself together and get its atoms into closest possible relation, what would happen? Well, the clay would turn into a fine white earth, which, baked in an oven, would become finest porcelain; or better still, left to itself, it would gradually grow hard and clear and able to gather out of light only the blue rays, and you would find instead of a morsel of clay a lovely blue sapphire. If the sand behaved in much the same fashion it would turn into a rainbow-hued opal. The soot, too, acting on the same principle, but trying even harder to grow hard, would become a

flashing diamond. And the water would form a sparkling dew-drop, or, if crystallized, a glistening star of snow.

It sounds like magic to think of a sapphire, an opal, a diamond, and a dew-drop all lying concealed in a dirty blob of mud. But it is the best magic, for it is true magic; and it preaches us a sermon.

It tells us not only that things may be much better than they seem, but that even in the poorest beggar there may be the soul of a great man. Not so very long ago a very poor-looking man used to sell newspapers and matches at a London street corner. Little did the passers-by think that they were paying their pennies to one of the greatest of poets, Francis Thompson.

But the mud that most people know best is a very commonplace sort of thing, especially when it comes to be the month of November. They never think of jewels in connection with it. Indeed they often say that they just hate it. It dirties their boots, and it splashes their skirts, and it makes their feet wet and uncomfortable.

Yet I have known people who thought mud was something to be thankful for. "Tak' me in among the dubs, they're soft and kindly; the hard road hurts me!" said an old Scotswoman to her daughter who was wheeling her in a bath-chair.

And there are other people who have found mud extremely useful, in fact they could not well do without it. There are towns in many parts of the world in

which the houses are built almost entirely of mud, and very warm and happy homes they are. At one of her mission stations in Africa, Mary Slessor had not only mud mission buildings, but her own little dwelling-house was an erection of wattle and mud. Much of her furniture too was made from mud; she had a mud sofa where she rested, and a mud seat near the fireplace, where the person who cooked for her could sit. And who does not know the wonderful little one-roomed houses that we should never see but for the mud? Where would the swallow be without the wherewithal to build them?

But mud can be something else than kindly and useful. You have heard how the mud of Flanders made our soldier lads suffer. If Ruskin were alive and had walked through one of their trenches I doubt if he would have thought of it as "jingling with jewels," for he hated ugly things. But I read these two lines somewhere just the other day—

> Two women looked through their prison bars;
> The one saw mud, the other saw stars.

And it may have been left to the "Tommies" of the Great War to find jewels among the terrible mud of the trenches.

What sort of jewels came within their reach, do you think? Not the sapphire, or the opal, or the diamond, but the jewels which are, in the sight of God, of great price. Patience and courage—you can understand how wonderful specimens of these were found in

Flanders. Love was there too—love of home, love of country, love of comrade.

> There are many kinds of sorrow
> In this world of love and hate,
> But there is no sterner sorrow
> Than a soldier for his mate.

What do you find in the mud? What do you find in the drab disagreeable duties or the tiresome lessons of every day? Do you find nothing but a feeling that makes you want to say "Ugh!" Your fathers and mothers know, and they could tell you, that there is a meaning in having to wade through mud. It makes men and women brave and patient and strong. So don't complain and say "Ugh!" too often. Remember that in the mud there is more than a mere chance of finding jewels.

A MORNING WITHOUT CLOUDS.

A morning without clouds.—2 Sam. xxiii. 4.

OUR text is taken from the last song that King David wrote. He was looking forward to the time when Jesus would come to reign on the earth, and he said that His rule would be like "a morning without clouds" —Jesus would be like the morning sun lighting up all the sky, and bringing gladness and light where before there was sadness and darkness.

But I want you to take the words in a different sense this morning—I want you to take them as your very own text; for life is like a day from sunrise to sunset, and you are in "the morning of life." And the best thing I could wish for you is that it may be "a morning without clouds."

Have you ever risen early on a fine spring morning in the country? As the dawn breaks the little birds burst into song. Then the sun rises and floods the world with gladness. The earth is refreshed with her sleep and the air is pure and sweet. There is something abroad that makes you feel as if you could dance and sing with joy.

The three things that strike you about such a morning are its purity, its beauty, and its gladness. And

those are just the three things that the morning of life should be—pure, and beautiful, and glad.

1. First of all, the morning of life should be *pure*. It is sin that darkens our sky and makes things gloomy. You have sometimes seen a beautiful, bright morning quickly clouded over; and many a morning of life that has promised brightly has been darkened ere long with the black thunder-clouds of sin.

Now it is not easy to keep pure, for even in life's morning the clouds of wicked thoughts and evil tempers and bad desires are ready to rise on our horizon. As yet they are tiny little cloudlets, but the only way to keep them from rising up and shadowing our life is to let Jesus, the Sun of Righteousness, shine into our hearts. He alone can keep those clouds away so that all our day may be bright, and that at evening time there may be light.

God has given you each a life, pure and fresh from Him. Some older people would give all they possess just to be standing where you stand full in the morning sunlight. Oh, boys and girls, realize the value of your gift before it is too late! Never stoop to anything that is mean, or base, or dishonourable. Ask God always to keep your souls like a pure, fresh, cloudless morning.

2. Secondly, the morning of life should be *beautiful*. It is said that if you want to see the Alps at their best you must rise at four in the morning. Then the glorious snow-crowned peaks shine out in all their

grandeur, free from the mists that often shroud them later. What makes the morning so beautiful? It is the light of the sun—the dawn after darkness.

Our morning of life should be beautiful too, but it will be truly beautiful only if the Sun of Righteousness shines in our hearts. He will make all the graces grow—the graces of love, and unselfishness, and kindness.

In a school in one of our great cities there was an annual flower show, at which prizes were awarded. And in the slums of this same great city lived a little cripple girl to whom someone had given a small geranium. Day by day she watched and tended her plant, and day by day the plant grew more beautiful. And when the day of the flower show came, the little cripple's geranium easily carried off the prize. When the judges asked her the secret of its beauty she told them that she had always kept it in the sun's rays, moving it as the sun travelled on.

It is the sun that gives beauty and strength to the flowers, and it is the Sun of Righteousness who gives beauty and strength to our lives.

3. Lastly, the "morning of life" should be *glad.*

When Robert Louis Stevenson was a small boy he was very delicate. Sometimes he was kept in the house all winter, and many were the weary sleepless nights that he spent longing for the dawn. For the boy had a great horror of the dark, and conjured up all sorts of imaginary terrors. He always looked forward to the time when the carts came in, for he

knew that when they rattled past the daybreak was not far away, and that in an hour or two the light would stream through the blind. Oh, the gladness of the morning after the long dark night!

And childhood is the glad time of life, bright and free from care. Be happy, boys and girls, just as happy as ever you can. But I want to tell you one thing—a very sure thing. Your morning will never be truly happy unless Christ has some part in it. For the same thing makes life glad that makes it pure and beautiful—Jesus Himself, the Sun of Righteousness, shining in our hearts.

There is just one thing more I want to say—*share your gladness.* You have strong bodies and happy homes, but there are other children whose morning is clouded—clouded by sickness, or want, or ignorance. There are suffering children in our hospitals, there are starving children in our slums, there are heathen children in far countries who have never heard of Jesus.

Now I think the grown-up people should look after the grown-ups who are in trouble, and I think the children should look after the children. And the best way to show our thankfulness for being so happy ourselves is to try to make others happy. Let us give our pennies, and our toys, and our prayers, and our time, to help some of the children whose morning is not "a morning without clouds."

A PRECIOUS GIFT.

He would not drink thereof, but poured it out unto the Lord.—2 Sam. xxiii. 16.

LATELY we have been hearing a great deal about the various honours which have been given to the brave men who fought for us in the war. We are very proud, aren't we? if we can say that *our* father or *our* brother or one of *our* best friends has got the D.C.M. or the D.S.O. or the M.C. or—highest of all honours—the V.C.

To-day I want to tell you of three brave warriors of old who had the D.S.O. In the twenty-third chapter of second Samuel you will find two lists of those who were known as King David's "mighty men." Three of them won an honour equal to our V.C. and thirty of them received an honour equal to our D.S.O. The three V.C.s did very gallant deeds, but it is not of them I want to speak to-day. It is of three out of the thirty D.S.O.s I want to talk.

You will find in four little verses of this chapter the story of one of their finest deeds. They were followers of King David in the troubled days when Saul was still alive and David was leading the life of a hunted man. We are told the names of two—Abishai and

Benaiah—but the name of the third we do not know.

At the time of the story David was at his favourite stronghold, Adullam. It was about twelve miles from his old home at Bethlehem. But Bethlehem was now in the hands of the Philistines, Israel's bitter enemies, and the town was filled with a Philistine garrison, whilst around it lay their outposts. David and his men—four hundred or so in number—were not strong enough to rid the town of the enemy but they did their best to worry and harass him by raids. Perhaps it was on his return from a raid on the Philistine hosts that David wished the wish that led to the famous adventure of to-day's sermon. It was high summer. The weather was scorching. The mountain torrents were dried up and water was scarcely to be had. Hot and tired and thirsty, David sighed aloud, "Oh for a drink of water from the well by the gate of Bethlehem!"

Perhaps poor David was as much home-sick as thirsty when he longed for that drink. Probably he was remembering the days when he was a shepherd boy watering his sheep from the clear spring by the gate. He thought he saw himself a little lad quaffing long draughts of its cool water, and he sighed as much for the days that had been as for the water itself.

I don't suppose that David knew he had spoken aloud, but three of his soldiers heard the wish and the sigh. They adored their splendid young leader, and one and all they determined then and there that they would bring him a drink of that water though it should

cost them their life. So they slipped away quietly, fought through the Philistine lines, filled a water bottle at the well by the gate, and fought their way back again. They arrived at Adullam no doubt spent and wounded, but they had the water safe. Imagine David's astonishment when he saw them and heard what they had done!

But David had a stronger feeling than astonishment. Do you know what it was? It was a feeling that the water which had almost cost those men their lives was sacred. To drink it, he felt, would be as if he were drinking their life-blood. He dared not drink it. It was so costly, so precious, there was but one thing to do with it. There was but one Person worthy of it, and that was God. So David poured it out as an offering to Jehovah.

I daresay the three men who had risked all to get that draught were a little disappointed when they saw the water sinking into the hot dry sand. But when David explained to them that he offered it to God because it was the finest gift he had ever been given and he felt unworthy of it, when David explained all that, I expect they went out from his presence very silently and thinking hard.

Boys and girls, David gave to God the most precious thing he had. What sort of gift do we give Him? Let me tell you two stories of what people give to God. The first is the story of an old man; the second is the story of a young girl.

The old man had come to the end of his life and he was making his will and disposing of his possessions. He was a farmer, so he had much in the way of live stock to divide among his sons and daughters. Suddenly he remembered that one of his cows was amissing, so he said, "If that lost cow is found give it to my youngest son, but if it is not found, let it be for God." All he was willing to give to God was what cost him nothing.

The other story comes from a mission station in Africa. It was Christmas Day, Christ's birthday, and on that day the natives brought with them to the mission house a gift for Christ. They were very, very poor, and their presents were mostly a handful of vegetables, or a little fruit. Those who brought a copper coin were accounted wealthy indeed.

Among the givers was a girl of sixteen who had very lately been converted from savagery. She stole forward timidly, and from the folds of her dress she drew out a silver coin of the value of 85 cents. It was a fortune for one in her position, and for a moment the missionary hesitated to take it; but to avoid a scene he accepted it without remark. Later he sought out the girl and asked her how she had been able to offer such a princely gift. With shining eyes she told him the secret. In order to bring to Jesus a gift worthy of His love for her and worthy of her love to Him, she had gone to a neighbouring planter the previous day and had bound herself to him as a slave for life in return for the silver coin She gave herself and all

her life to Christ in that one grand act. It was the most, and she felt it was the least, she could give.

Boys and girls, what do we give to Christ? Is it the old man's gift of less than nothing? Is it the slave girl's gift of our lives and ourselves?

A THRONE FOR THE KING'S MOTHER.

And the king rose up to meet her, and bowed himself unto her, and sat down on his throne, and caused a throne to be set for the king's mother; and she sat on his right hand.—1 Kings ii. 19.

If I were to ask you what you thought the greatest thing about King Solomon I wonder what your answer would be.

Perhaps some of you would say his wealth and magnificence. We read of his wonderful ivory throne overlaid with gold, of the golden drinking vessels which were used in the palace, of the golden shields of his bodyguard. We learn that ships came from strange countries bearing treasure, that kings brought him costly gifts, and that in his reign silver was counted as stones. We are told that he "exceeded all the kings of the earth in riches."

And yet at the end of his life Solomon found that all his glory was but "vanity of vanities." In gaining his wealth he had lost something much more precious—the love and trust of many of his people; and he knew that as regarded the best and highest things his life had been a failure. So I think we must admit that Solomon's wealth was not the greatest or best thing in his life.

Perhaps others of you say that the greatest thing about King Solomon was his wisdom. And you remind me that he chose above all things "an understanding heart." You tell me how wisely he judged the people and how, when the Queen of Sheba came from far to prove him with hard questions, she went away saying that not the half had been told her of all his wisdom.

But although Solomon was a wise judge and was clever at answering riddles he was not always a wise ruler. He gained his magnificence at the price of the people's oppression, and it was largely owing to his misrule that the greater part of the kingdom was taken away from his son Rehoboam.

Shall I tell you what I think was the greatest thing about King Solomon, the thing I like best to remember about him? It was his reverence for his mother.

Right at the beginning of his reign we have a little picture of how he received his mother when she came to him with a petition. Solomon was only about twenty years old at the time. His head might well have been turned by his position. But when the queen mother came into his presence he did not wave her aside with a haughty gesture and tell her to await the king's pleasure. No, he paid her the greatest honour and deference that he knew. He "rose up to meet her, and bowed himself unto her, and sat down on his throne, and caused a throne to be set for the king's mother; and she sat on his right hand."

I think that must have been one of the proudest moments of Solomon's life, when he rose up in all the

glory of his young manhood and his power to welcome his mother, and to give her the seat of honour at his side.

Something very like this happened in the life of one of the Presidents of the United States.

His name was James Garfield and he started life as a poor boy in a little log-cabin. Bit by bit, by dint of perseverance and hard work, he made his way up, until at last he was elected President of the United States.

As the day drew near for the inauguration ceremony when he was to be made President, he wrote to his old mother and asked her to accompany him to Washington, the capital city. His mother replied that she would be quite out of place among all the grand people who would take part in the ceremony, and that she would just stay at home and pray for him. But Garfield wrote back, "I'll not go without you!"

So together they travelled to Washington. They stayed in the same hotel, and when the time came for the ceremony Mrs. Garfield went out leaning on her son's arm and together they entered the carriage that was waiting for them. Together they drove to the Capitol, where the great ceremony was to take place. There they found waiting a great crowd of about a hundred thousand people. On the platform were all the celebrated men from all over the country—judges, and governors, and ministers.

Together Garfield and his mother mounted the platform. And then he did a beautiful thing. In front of that great sea of faces all turned towards him,

he gave his mother the chair, the seat of honour, that had been provided for himself. Then he delivered his inaugural address; and after he had taken the oath to be faithful to his office, he turned and put his arms round his mother and kissed her.

These are two pictures of how two great men treated their mother. How are you treating yours? Remember that the way in which you act towards your mother proves what kind of boy or girl you are. It is one of the very best signs if you are good to her, and one of the very worst if you treat her with contempt.

Now most of us would scorn to treat our mother with contempt, and yet we often give her a great deal of trouble. We say we love her, and we mean it too, but we are cross and disobedient and disobliging. We forget that the real proof that we love people is that we try to please them. The love that is all words and that costs us nothing isn't of much value.

I want to give you three reasons why you should be good to your mother.

1. And the first is *because you will never again meet anyone like her.* You may live till you are a hundred but you will never have a second mother. Nobody will love you again in just the same sort of way. Nobody will have so much patience with your faults.

> My Mother she's so good to me,
> Ef I wuz good as I could be,
> I couldn't be as good—no, *sir*!
> Can't *any* boy be good as *her*!

She loves me when I'm glad er sad;
She loves me when I'm good er bad;
An', what's the funniest thing, she says,
She loves me when she punishes.[1]

It is from the love of our mothers that we can have a faint idea of God's love for us. They never stop loving us, and they never stop believing in us, not even when everybody else has given us up as a bad job. The greater number of us would not be half the men and women we are, if it were not for the love, and the care, and the prayers of our mothers.

2. The second reason why you should be good to your mother is that by so doing *you will save yourself many bitter regrets.* Many a grown man would give all he possesses just to have his mother back again so that he might smooth out the wrinkles he had imprinted on her face and make up to her for all the sorrow he had caused her. You have still got your mother with you. Be good to her and you will live to be thankful for it. Remember any wrong or unworthy thing you do hurts her more than it hurts anyone else on earth, because she loves you most.

Here is a story told of another President of the United States—George Washington. When he was a boy he resolved that he would go to sea as a midshipman. All the arrangements were made, his trunk was even packed and away, and George went to say good-bye to his mother. He found her in tears, and what do you think he did? He turned to a servant and said,

[1] James Whitcomb Riley.

"Go and fetch back my trunk. I will not go away and break my mother's heart." His mother was so struck with his decision that she said, "God has promised to bless the children who honour their parents. I believe He will bless you." And He did.

3. The third reason why you should be good to your mother is that it is *one of the best ways to serve your country.* Perhaps you think that seems a queer thing to say, but it's like this. All through history it has been seen that the strongest and most prosperous people are those whose children obey the Fifth Commandment. If you don't learn early to obey and reverence your parents you won't learn later to obey and reverence authority. And a country where there is no reverence for authority is in a very shaky condition. So the very greatest service you can do for your country at present is to render honour and obedience to your parents.

Just one word more, and it is about One greater than Solomon. Jesus Christ was the Ruler not merely of a little Eastern kingdom but of all the earth, and yet almost all that we know of Him for eighteen years—from the time He was twelve till He was thirty—is that He was subject unto His parents. And when He was hanging on the cross, He forgot His own agony to give His sorrowing mother into the charge of the disciple He loved.

Jesus Christ was the most tender and chivalrous of sons, and if we want to please and serve Him here below one of the first things we must do is to love, and reverence, and obey our mother.

DAY-DREAMS.

And Solomon awoke, and, behold, it was a dream.—1 Kings iii. 15.

HAVE you ever dreamt dreams? I expect most of you have. And queer things some of them were! If you want to find the cause of them you won't have very far to seek. It is often because you have eaten too much of something very nice for supper. And the reason why we sometimes dream such very odd and impossible things is that when we dream, although part of our brain is awake—the imaginative part—yet the bit that judges and reasons is asleep, and so our imagination really runs away with us.

But there is a certain amount of sense in our dreams too, for I think you will find that very often you dream of something you have been thinking about or longing for. Perhaps the holidays are near and you are looking forward to a glorious time in the country. You have been thinking about it for days, and drawing pictures in your mind of all the nice things you are going to do. And when you fall asleep at night, you dream that you are helping to pack the boxes, or that you are setting out for the railway station. Sometimes you find yourself in the train and looking out of the carriage window. But the provoking bit of it is that you so

very rarely get to your destination. Just when you are nearing it something happens and you wake up.

Now, Solomon once dreamt a dream. But his was a much more marvellous dream than any of ours; for a wonderful thing happened in it—God spoke to him. You know sometimes in the old days God did speak to people in that way. But what I want you to notice is that Solomon dreamt about the thing that had been most in his thoughts and nearest his heart. He had just come to the throne and he wanted to rule wisely and well. But he was very young and he felt he knew very little about it. And so, when God offered to give him whatever he desired, instead of riches, instead of long life or honour, he chose wisdom to rule. If God had appeared to him in the daytime and given him the same choice, he would have made the same decision. Solomon's day-dream was to be a good and wise king, and so his night-dream was the same.

1. I suppose most of you have day-dreams. You dream about what you are going to be and do when you grow up. Now some people fancy that day-dreams are silly things and do more harm than good, but I don't think that and I shall tell you why. *If you don't dream great things it is very unlikely you will ever do them.* It is the people who have dreamt great things who have done them.

But of course the usefulness of day-dreams depends upon what kind of dreams they are. I remember reading about one man whose dream was to have a

tremendously big funeral. And he left instructions in his will that every boy or girl who came to his funeral was to receive a penny. So when he died seven thousand boys and girls came to his funeral and received their pennies!

That seems a very senseless sort of dream, doesn't it? But I'm not sure that some of ours are not just as foolish. However I'm not going to tell you to stop dreaming; only be sure your dreams are worth dreaming.

2. But our dreams are not going to come true without our working for them. The best dreams are not easily realized. So *besides dreaming we must do.*

There was a boy once called Charles Dickens. When he was quite small he was very poor. But he made up his mind that when he grew up he would buy the beautiful old house of Gadshill near where he lived. By and by he became a famous novelist and he did buy Gadshill.

There was another boy whose name was Warren Hastings. He belonged to a very old family who had owned a beautiful estate in Worcestershire called Daylesford. But the family had become very poor, and Warren's grandfather had been obliged to sell the estate. One summer day, when Warren was a very small boy, he lay on the banks of a river near Daylesford, and he resolved that some day he would buy back Daylesford. When he grew to be a man he went to India as a clerk, and after many years he rose to be Governor-General of India. And when he came

home he did buy back Daylesford and he lived there till he died.

Both these boys realized their dreams, but they worked hard through long years to do it. Are you prepared to work for your dreams? Are you prepared to take a great deal of trouble to have them realized? If they are good dreams they are worth it.

3. But *sometimes we have to give up our dreams.* Some day we may awake and find they were dreams, and only dreams.

Sometimes people have to give up their dreams for the sake of others. Do you think they are the poorer for it? No, I think they are all the richer. And I think that some day, somewhere, what they lose will be made up to them.

The other day I read a sort of parable about a boy whose dream it was to write a great book. But his mother was a poor widow and he had a number of younger brothers and sisters; so he had to work very hard as a miner to keep them all, and he had no time to realize his dream.

At last a brother grew old enough to earn, and the boy thought that now he would be able to begin the book. But the brother had just started work when an accident occurred in the mine and he was crippled for life.

After some years the mother died and the boy, who was now a man, thought that at last he would be free to write his book. But just then a married sister lost her husband. She was very poor, and had four little

children to provide for. So the brother took the children home and became a father to them.

When they were all grown up and he was old and grey, he thought that at last he would have leisure to write his book. But one day when he was walking along a street he saw a child in danger of being run over. He hurried to the rescue, was knocked down and so badly hurt that there was no hope of his recovery.

When he came to die his great regret was that he had never written his book. But as he lay thinking about it, suddenly an angel appeared bearing a volume in his hand. And the angel said, "Here is thy book. It is a very noble book. Many shall read it and be the better for it." And when the man looked at the volume he saw that the title was "The Story of a Noble Life." It was the record of all the kind things he had done, of all he had given up and borne for the sake of others, and it was a far finer book than any he could have written with pen or pencil.

So you see that sometimes it is a grander thing to give up your dreams than to realize them. But don't give them up for any unworthy reason, don't let them go too easily. Solomon became a worse man when he gave up his day-dreams, and many men and women have been like him.

And remember there is one dream we need never give up. It is the dream that we may be good servants of Jesus Christ, and live noble, true, unselfish lives. That is a dream we can all keep, and it is a dream that, God helping us, we can all realize.

THE TREE OF THE LORD.

The cedar that is in Lebanon.—1 Kings iv. 33.

WHAT is the oldest living thing in the world? It isn't a human being, although there are plenty centenarians —that is, people a hundred years old and over—alive to-day. It isn't a bird, although the crow, the eagle, and the swan are known to live to a hundred. It isn't a land animal, although the tortoise is said to reach the mature age of three hundred and fifty. It isn't a sea animal, although scientists tell us that the whale may arrive at the tremendous total of five hundred years and more.

No, if you want to see the oldest living thing in the world you have to go to the vegetable kingdom. Among the trees you will find the longest livers known. And of long-lived trees perhaps the longest lived is the cedar. There are cedars 800 years old for certain, and others which are suspected to be nearly 2000 years of age. That is to say, they were young trees when Christ came to earth.

We have cedars in this country, and we think them fine trees, but they are poor specimens compared with the cedar of the text, for the cedars of Lebanon were noted the world over for size and height and beauty.

As perhaps you know, the cedar belongs to the family of conifer or cone-bearing trees. The cedar is a kind of pine. It has long narrow needle-like leaves which grow on the branches in tufts, very much like the tufts of a larch. But the cedar's leaves are dark green, and they do not drop off in winter as our larch needles do. They remain on the tree for about four years and they fall off by degrees, so that the tree is always green. The branches are broad and spreading, and the Bible tells us of the dense shade that they give —only the Bible calls it by a more poetical name, it speaks of the cedar's "shadowing shroud."

The Bible calls the cedar "the glory of Lebanon," and in Old Testament days very likely the whole of the lower slopes of the Lebanon range were covered with these majestic giants. But to-day the cedars of Lebanon are fewer and farther between. They grow in groves, mostly on the western slopes. Perhaps those who hewed down the cedars for the building of Solomon's temple and palace are responsible. Perhaps the Arabs through the ages have been too anxious for firewood. At any rate the cedars are not so plentiful as they once were.

The cedar is not only a magnificent tree while it is growing, it is a magnificent tree when it is cut down. Its wood is strong and sound and fine, and it takes a high polish. It resists dry rot and the inroad of insects. There are no little worm-holes, such as you often see in old furniture, to be found in cedar wood. It is fragrant too. The resin in it gives it a delightful smell which

is health-giving and keeps away moths. That is why furs and woollen articles are packed away in drawers made of cedar wood, or have chips of cedar laid away amongst them. If you want to know what the "smell of Lebanon" is like, take a sniff of the polish that is used to saturate an O-Cedar mop. That is cedar oil.

Besides being strong and fine and fragrant, cedar wood is lasting. In a certain old Greek temple the cedar beams are said to have lasted 1178 years. And we know in our days that the cedar-wood snake fences which the earliest settlers in Canada put up are in many cases as fresh to-day as the day they were erected.

The Bible looks upon the cedar as the king of trees, just as we look upon the lion as the king of beasts. It speaks of the cedar as the "tree of the Lord." The Hebrews, when they saw anything in nature specially grand or beautiful, always said, "It is the Lord's." Strangely enough, the cedar of Lebanon's relation, the cedar of the Himalayas, is called by the natives of India the "deodar," that is, the "tree of God."

There is one thing more I want you to notice about the cedar, and it is that the righteous, the good people, are compared to the cedar. The psalmist who said it was paying good people the highest compliment he could think of when he said they would grow like a cedar in Lebanon. He meant that their characters would be as strong and splendid as those great mountain trees.

Now, the writer of the Psalm might have said even more than he did about good people being like cedars,

for they are like them in more ways than in having strong characters. They are like them because they are sound all through; there is no bad wood in their composition. And they are fine as well as strong. Their hearts are gentle and courteous. They are fragrant too. Wherever they go the world is sweeter for their presence. Evil cannot touch them as the worms cannot live in the cedar wood, and they keep others from evil as the cedar wood preserves the fur from moths. Last, but not least, they live not for a thousand years or so, but for ever. The Arabs say of the cedar, "It is immortal." The good man or woman, the true "tree of the Lord," is more truly immortal than any cedar.

NARROW LIGHTS.

Windows of narrow lights (RV "windows of fixed lattice-work").—1 Kings vi. 4.

THERE seems to be a good deal of doubt as to what these windows were like. In the Authorized Version of the Bible—the version most of you have—it says they were "windows of narrow lights." The Revised Version says they were "windows of fixed lattice-work," and the margins of both say they were "broad within, and narrow without"—very much like the windows you may have seen in an old castle. Very probably these windows were formed either of lattice-work or of slabs of stone pierced with narrow slits. They were fixed so that they could not open or shut.

But, whatever their form, one thing seems certain—they let in very little light. Artificial light was used in the Temple and so they perhaps served to let in air rather than light, for of course there was no glass in them

At the present day we do not make our windows with narrow lights, we make them large and wide, and a window that does not let in light is not serving the chief purpose for which it was made.

Now you and I possess two sets of windows each—the windows of the mind and the windows of the heart. And we must see to it that they are broad windows and

not narrow—windows that let in plenty of light, windows that give us broad views of the world and all that it contains.

1. First there are the windows of the mind. It is through them that we take in impressions, knowledge, ideas.

Now some people have such narrow openings in their mind that they can take in only one or two ideas. And when they have taken these in they stick to them as though they were the only ideas that existed. So their minds are starved for want of light and they never grow any wiser.

There are others who think that certain things can be done only in a certain way; and if anybody else does them in a different way they imagine that that person is altogether wrong.

For instance, you yourselves know how it is at school. A particular teacher has taught you for a year or two and you have grown very fond of her. Then one day she leaves and a new teacher comes. This other has new methods, new ways of doing things, and you don't like it. These methods may be just as good as your old teacher's were, in fact they may be better, but you are not accustomed to them and you rebel. Sometimes you tell the newcomer that Miss So-and-so didn't do this and Miss So-and-so didn't do that. In short you give her a horrid time.

Now if your new teacher has any sense she will just stick to her own methods and not listen to you, and if you

have any sense you will come to see that there is more than one good way of doing a good thing. Of course it is a trying experience to have all your notions upset and to have to get accustomed to new ways, but it is very good for you too. It is widening the windows of your mind.

There are other people, again, who think that *their* opinion is the only right one, and that anyone who thinks differently from them is altogether wrong.

Did you ever hear the story of the six blind men of Hindostan who went to "see" the elephant in order to find out what it was like? It is told in a delightful little poem.

The first blind man stumbled up against the side of the animal, and without examining it any further he called out that the elephant was "very like a wall."

The second seized the tusk. It seemed round and smooth and sharp so he exclaimed that the elephant was certainly "very like a spear."

The third grasped the squirming trunk and he maintained that the elephant was "very like a snake."

The fourth stretched out a hand and felt all round a leg. He averred that the elephant was "very like a tree."

The fifth chanced to touch the ear and he was convinced that the elephant was "very like a fan."

The sixth happened to seize the tail, which swung about in his hand. He declared that the elephant was "very like a rope."

> And so these men of Hindostan
> Disputed loud and long,
> Each in his own opinion
> Exceeding stiff and strong,

Though *each* was *partly* in the right,
And *each* was *partly* wrong.

And so, boys and girls, don't imagine that because somebody thinks differently from you *they* are absolutely wrong and *you* are absolutely right. Perhaps that is the case, but it is much more likely that you are both partly right and partly wrong, and it may be that you are quite wrong and they are quite right. There is room for many opinions in the world, and we can all learn something from each other.

2. And then there are the windows of the heart. It is through them that we take in sympathy and love, it is through them that we get our experience of life, our knowledge of men and women and boys and girls, of their ways and their doings, of their troubles and their pleasures, of their sorrows and their joys. And we must take pains to see that these windows are built wide, for if we don't, then we shall grow narrow and self-centred and unsympathetic.

Jesus had a great many windows in His heart. He had a window on every side. And they were so wide that they took in everybody. He sympathized with all our joys and sorrows. He made Himself one with us. And if you want to be truly great, truly noble, truly helpful, you must have wide windows too.

3. And, boys and girls, if we don't try to widen our windows the danger is that they will get choked up altogether so that no light at all will enter.

I wonder how many of you have heard your father speak of a tax which he calls the "inhabited house

duty," and I wonder how many of you have noticed old houses with built-up windows. You can see the mark of where a window once was, but now the space has been filled up with bricks or stones. Did you know that these bricked-up windows and the "inhabited house duty" had any connection? Well they have.

The history of the windows goes back to the year 1697 in the reign of William III. In that year the silver coinage was reminted. Now many of the old coins had been clipped and worn, and in order to pay for the recoining and to make up for the deficiency a tax was put upon windows. Any house that had more than six windows and a rental of more than £5 a year was taxed. Many people were annoyed at the tax, and rather than pay it they built up their windows. If they had two in one room they bricked up one of them.

The tax was continued till 1851, when it was removed, and a tax on the rental of the house, a tax which we call the "inhabited house duty," was put in its place. It may interest you to know that the window tax still exists in France.

And boys and girls, it is like that with the windows of our mind, it is like that with the windows of our heart. If we don't keep trying to enlarge them they will become bricked up. The light will cease to penetrate and all our soul will be in darkness.

Let us ask the great Master Builder to widen our windows. Let us keep them wide by opening our minds to receive all good knowledge and our hearts to understand and to sympathize with those around us.

REHOBOAM THE UNWISE.

But he forsook the counsel of the old men which they had given him, and took counsel with the young men that were grown up with him.—1 Kings xii. 8.

THERE are some men in the Bible who are like sign-posts placed on a road to show us the right way to go. They lived brave and true lives, and we shall do well if we follow in their footsteps. Such men are Samuel, and Daniel, and Josiah the boy king in the Old Testament, and Stephen in the New.

There are other men who are like those motor signs which tell us that a certain turning or a certain hill is to be taken with care, or that we are approaching a hidden side road. They are the men who were not altogether good and not altogether bad, the men who made mistakes and committed grave errors, but who afterwards sincerely repented and tried to make up for their faults. I think among these we must count Jacob and David in the Old Testament and the apostle Peter in the New. And they seem to say to us, "Go with caution, and avoid the mistakes we made."

But there is another class who are like the danger signals on thin ice. They are the men who were foolish and obstinate, who rushed headlong on a mad career which led to their own ruin. And they seem

to say, "Turn aside altogether from this way, for it is fatal for you to walk in it." Among these last is Rehoboam the son of Solomon.

Rehoboam succeeded to the throne at a very troublous time in the history of Israel. There had always been a good deal of jealousy and ill-feeling between the Northern tribes and the tribe of Judah, and of late years this feeling had increased. Besides this the people were very discontented on account of the heavy burdens that King Solomon had laid upon them. In order to maintain the magnificence of his court he had made many of them work like slaves and had imposed very high taxes on them.

The leader of the Northern tribes was a strong, ambitious man named Jeroboam to whom the prophet Ahijah had promised five-sixths of the kingdom. On the day that Rehoboam was crowned, Jeroboam came to him with a petition from the people. They begged that the yoke which King Solomon had laid upon them might be lightened, that some of their taxes might be taken away and their work made less hard. And on condition that Rehoboam should comply with their wishes they promised to serve him faithfully.

Rehoboam seemed rather taken aback at their proposal. It was a new thing for the people to dictate terms to the king. He asked for three days in which to think out his answer and his request was granted.

In the meantime Rehoboam sought advice upon the matter. First he consulted the old men, the experienced

counsellors of his father King Solomon, and they advised him to conciliate the people. They told him that if he would consent to the wishes of his people, give up his own desires, and seek to serve them in this matter, then he would win their allegiance and bind them to him for ever.

But this kind of advice did not suit King Rehoboam. He had been a spoiled boy all his life. He had been brought up in a luxurious court where nothing had ever been denied him, and he was not prepared to give up his own wishes, or, as he thought, lower his dignity. He turned his back upon his father's sage counsellors and sought the advice of the young men who, like himself, had been brought up in the lap of luxury. And these silly young coxcombs advised him to give an arrogant answer. "Tell the people," they said, "that instead of lightening their yoke you will add to it, that whereas your father chastised them with whips you will chastise them with scorpions." The answer pleased Rehoboam and flattered his foolish pride. Was he not an absolute monarch, and could he not do as he liked with his own? So he rejected the advice of the old men and gave to the people the answer of the young men.

It was the last straw. Through the camp sounded the cry, "To your tents, O Israel!" And before the night fell Rehoboam found that of all the kingdom his father had ruled over, he was left with the tribe of Judah only. For Israel departed from Judah that day—never again to be united with it under one king.

Now I wonder why we have raked up this old story to-day. Well, you remember, at the beginning we compared Rehoboam to a danger signal on ice. And what is it he warns us off? I think it is just the thin ice of taking bad or foolish advice.

You know we have all to make decisions in life. Sometime or other we have to decide on our career; very often we have to choose between two paths which lead in opposite directions; every day we have to make a choice between good and evil; always we have to choose between serving God and following the desires of our lower nature. It is well when we can have at our side a wise counsellor.

1. There are two things I want to say to you, and the first is—*always be ready to listen to the advice of older and wiser people.*—Perhaps you think them cautious and slow-going, but they have lived much longer in the world than you. What you have just read or heard about, they have learned by experience; and in nine cases out of ten they are right and you are wrong. You can beat them perhaps in energy and enthusiasm, and it is right that it should be so, but they can beat you at every turn in wisdom and knowledge of the world. One of the reasons why you have a father is that he may be there to advise you.

It is said that Napoleon lost the battle of Waterloo because one of his generals was too proud to take the advice of those who were wiser than himself.

That general's name was Grouchy. He intended taking his troops to Wavre and two other generals

advised him to take them straight to Waterloo. Their tone was rather dictatorial and Grouchy resented it. He persisted in taking his men to Wavre. And so, at a critical moment in the battle, when Napoleon was counting on his aid, he failed to appear. He was not in time to save the Emperor from final disaster.

2. And the second thing I want to say is—*always be rather suspicious of advice that suits you.*—Now please don't run away with the idea that all that is agreeable is wrong. What I mean is that very often when we ask for advice it is because we are hesitating between a path that is difficult but right, and one that is easy but wrong.

All Scottish boys and girls know the name of Robert Burns and some of the older ones here know that although Burns wrote such marvellous poetry his own life was a sad failure. He had something very fine and noble in his nature, but he yielded to temptation, and so he never became the splendid man he might have been.

Now at one time Burns felt specially drawn to higher things. He began to feel very dissatisfied with the life he was leading. He began to be afraid of the consequences of that life. And in his heart there was a great longing for God and for the things that are true and right. Unfortunately, the poet consulted an unwise friend who advised him to drown his fears in bowls of wine and forget them in foolish pleasures. It was the easy way, and Burns took the pleasant advice. So he made a wreck of his life and of his better self.

There is one Guide who will never lead us astray, and we can always have His guidance for the asking. It is a good rule through life never to start an undertaking or make any important decision without taking God's advice. And whether our decisions be great or small we can never go far wrong if we keep close to His side and listen to His voice.

PRETENDING.

Why feignest thou thyself to be another?—1 Kings xiv. 6.

THESE words were spoken to a queen who was trying to make herself look like a peasant woman. She was the wife of King Jeroboam. Her little boy was very sick and she had come to see the prophet Ahijah hoping that he would speak some word to make the child well again.

Now the king knew that the prophet was very displeased with him because he had forsaken the true God for idols, and he thought that if Ahijah knew who the queen was he would refuse to give her a blessing. So he told her to dress herself like a peasant woman and take the prophet a present such as a farmer's wife might bring—bread and cakes, and a jar of honey.

But God whispered in Ahijah's ear that the wife of King Jeroboam was coming to visit him in disguise. So, although he was blind, the prophet knew the queen the moment she crossed the threshold, and he called out to her, "Come in, thou wife of Jeroboam; why feignest thou thyself to be another? Why art thou pretending to be somebody else?" I think the queen must have felt very frightened when she knew she had been found out.

I want to speak to you to-day about bad pretending. But what do we mean by bad pretending? Well, there are two or three different kinds of pretending, and they are not all bad. There is the kind we do when we are very small and that is a good kind. Why, it wouldn't be worth while being a boy or girl if we couldn't pretend. Whatever should we do on a wet day if we couldn't be kings, and queens, and fairies, and witches, and animals, and engine-drivers, and motormen, and cannibals, and explorers, and pirates? Half the fun in life would be gone if we couldn't dress up and imagine we were somebody else.

And there is the kind of pretending some of us do when we have got some nasty medicine to swallow or some disagreeable task to perform. We can try to imagine it is something really quite nice and pleasant. That is a brave kind of pretending.

But there are other kinds of pretending that are not quite so harmless. Some people have tried so hard to ape somebody else that they have forgotten what their real selves are like. And some people have so got into the habit of pretending to be better, or richer, or cleverer than they are that nobody knows which is the real person and which is the pretence. And so I want to say two things to you—first *be yourself* and second *be what you seem.*

1. *Be yourself.*—I have known boys who admired a big brother, or uncle, or cousin, or friend so much that they went on imitating him until they really began to look a little like him. Well, so long as the friend was

worth imitating I don't know that it was altogether a bad thing. But there is always a danger that we imitate the wrong person, and there is always a danger that we imitate so hard that we lose our own individuality, that we cease to be ourselves and just turn out bad copies of somebody else.

And then sometimes it is the fashion to behave and speak in a particular way and everybody tries to copy that way.

Once I visited a small town where there were a number of girls just growing up, and there was one thing that struck me about them. Although their faces were different, their actions and their conversation were extraordinarily alike. You could almost be sure that, given the same circumstances, they would behave in exactly the same way. They had only two adjectives. One of them was "beastly," the other was "ripping." And if you asked them a question, or made a remark, you could almost foretell what the answer would be, and almost foresee the particular kind of smile with which it would be accompanied. Well, of course, you grew very tired of seeing and hearing the same thing over and over again. I don't know whom these girls were trying to copy, or who and what they were "feigning to be," but they weren't like real, live girls at all; they were just puppets.

Now God never meant us to be made all of one pattern. The world would be a very dull place if all the flowers were the same shape and colour, and all the birds sang the same songs. You have a place to

fill that nobody else can fill and a work to do that nobody else can do, and God wants you to be just yourself.

2. *Be what you seem to be.*—In the insect kingdom there are some wonderful insects which look just like a bit of the plant or flower they are resting upon. There are the stick insects whose bodies resemble stems both in shape and in colour, and whose legs look like twigs. Although some of them are over a foot long it is very difficult to see them when they are resting on the branch of a tree or shrub. Away in Ceylon there is an insect called the leaf insect which has made itself look exactly like one of the leaves of the plant on which it rests. It has copied the colour of the leaf and it has even imitated its veins and markings. And there is another insect which in the early stages of its existence has no wings to help it to escape from its enemies. So it drags itself through old spider's webs and covers itself with web and dust until it makes itself look very big and terrifying. When the time comes for it to have wings it brushes off its dirty coat.

Now all these creatures have some excuse for looking like something else. They are small and feeble, and they wear a disguise to protect them from their enemies. But we have no excuse for seeming what we are not.

Do you know the fable of the jackdaw that tried to be a peacock? He thought the peacocks were very fine birds, and he admired their beautiful tails and

their grand manners. So one day he picked up some of their old feathers that were lying about the yard and stuck them in his own tail. And then he went to call on the peacocks. But the peacocks were not a bit taken in. First they laughed at him, and then they ran at him and plucked out his borrowed feathers. And when he returned to the jackdaws they would have nothing to do with him either, because he had thought himself too grand for them and only fit to be a peacock. So the silly jackdaw learned too late that it is better to be a real jackdaw than an imitation peacock, it is better to be true and humble than false and grand.

The people who pretend to be grander than they are are called "snobs." But there is something worse even than being a snob, and that is being a hypocrite. And that is the name we give to those who pretend to be better than they are.

On a hill near Bath there stands a building that looks like a fine castle. But it isn't a castle at all; it is only a wall built to look like a castle, and the people there call it "Sham Castle."

You wouldn't like just to be shams, would you, empty shams that are of no use to anybody? Then be real and true. Scorn all deceitful ways. Be the kind of boy and girl whose word can be relied on, the kind of boy and girl whom everybody can trust. Be upright and downright at all times. Then you will never run the risk of being anything else than what you seem to be.

TRUST AND GET THE BLESSING.

She went and did according to the saying of Elijah: and she, and he, and her house, did eat many days.—1 Kings xvii. 15.

Do you remember the years during the Great War when food was so scarce that it had to be strictly rationed so that everybody might have a little? Do you remember how mother planned and schemed to make the small meat allowance go as far as possible? Do you remember how you had only a scrape of butter or margarine on your bread, how your tea hardly tasted of sugar, and how jam on your bread was a rare treat?

To-day's story is about a time in the history of Israel when food was ten times as scarce as it was during the war years we remember. But the reason for the scarceness was not a war, it was a three years' drought —three years of no rain, during which the crops withered for lack of moisture, and the cattle died for lack of food, and the people perished of hunger.

And the awful thing was that the famine was the people's own fault. God had sent it to them as a punishment for their sins. They had been forgetting God. Worse than that, they had been worshipping a false god in His stead. Sad to say their king, Ahab, was largely to blame for this. For he had yielded to

the wishes of his wicked heathen wife Queen Jezebel, had built a temple in Samaria to her favourite god Baal, and had encouraged the foolish people of Israel to worship him.

So one day God sent his prophet Elijah to warn the king that there would be neither rain nor mist in the land until the day when he, Elijah, said so. And as Elijah prophesied so it came to pass. The prophet himself went and lived for a time in the wilderness beside the brook Cherith, and the ravens, you remember, brought him food night and morning. But at last, for lack of rain, the brook dried up, and God then told Elijah to go to a certain city called Zarephath. There God promised he would find a widow woman who would feed him and give him a home.

The prophet was rather surprised at God's command: for Zarephath was a city of Zidon, and the people of Zidon were heathens—in fact Jezebel's father was king of the Zidonians—and to go down to a city where Jezebel might hear of him and seize him was like walking into the jaws of the wolf. But though Elijah was surprised he never dreamt of disobeying. He trusted God and set out on his journey.

When he arrived at the gate of Zidon there he saw a poor woman gathering sticks. Something told him that this was the widow God had spoken of, so he went up to her and asked her if she would be kind enough to bring him a drink of water. She turned away to fetch a little water for this strange-looking man with the stern face and the camel's-hair mantle of a prophet,

and as she was going he called after her, "And please bring me a morsel of bread too!" The woman stopped and looked at him and then she said sadly, "Bread! How can I bring you bread? I have only a very little meal left in the barrel, just enough to make one baking of bread; and I have only enough oil left in the cruse to bake it with. These sticks are to make the fire. Then my son and I shall eat our last meal. After that we must starve and die."

"No," said the prophet. "No. You need not fear that you will die of starvation. Do as you said. Bake your bread and give me some of it. I promise you in the name of my God that neither your barrel of meal nor your cruse of oil shall be empty so long as the famine lasts."

It was an extraordinary thing to say and I'm sure the woman gazed in amazement at this strange prophet who promised her such wonderful things in the name of the God of Israel. Always to have plenty whilst the famine lasted! It sounded too good to be true. Was she a fool to trust him and give him a share of the last bite of food she possessed? He was an absolute stranger and he was very likely making up a story for his own ends. Could she, dare she, trust him? . . . Yes, she would.

She went and did exactly what he had told her to do, and the result was that so long as the famine lasted her barrel of meal was miraculously filled and so was her cruse of oil.

Don't you think that woman's faith in Elijah and

her obedience to his wishes were splendid? Don't you think she deserved the blessing that she got? Would you have done as she did?

Boys and girls, we can still show the same faith as that woman of Zarephath. Elijah's command to her was really God's command. And God's command is the same to-day as it was in the days of that far-off famine. He still says to you and to me, "Trust Me and do My will." But some of us won't trust Him. We prefer to trust ourselves and go our own way, and so we miss the blessing. Shall I tell you a story to make this clear?

Once upon a time there was a certain king who wanted to find a servant and friend whom he could trust. He gave out that he wanted a man to do a day's work, and two men applied for the situation. The king engaged them at a fixed wage, and then he told them what he wanted them to do. They were to spend the day drawing water from a well but—and this was the curious thing—they were to pour the bucketfuls into a basket.

After emptying his bucket once or twice, one of the men pitched it away in a rage crying, "This is a fool's job! I shall do no more of it!" But the other said, "It is the job the king asked us to do, and it is the job we are being paid for doing. We have no right to stop." So he went on faithfully dipping his bucket into the well and pouring its contents into the basket.

By and by his eyes caught the glitter of something shining in the mud at the bottom of the well. It was

a precious diamond ring. "Ah!" said he, "now I see why the king set us to this task, and why we were told to pour the water into a basket. If the water had brought up the ring before the well was dry, the ring would have been found in the basket." So he took the ring to the king.

But the king said, "Keep it. You are a man whom I can trust because you obeyed and trusted me when you did not understand my reasons. I see I can trust you in greater things." And he gave him a high position.

Boys and girls, you will find, especially as you grow older, that sometimes it seems difficult to do as God commands, for you don't see the reason behind His command. But never mind that: Just go on obeying and trusting, and you will find a blessing as surely as did that faithful servant, as surely as did that poor starving widow of Zarephath.

LAME MINDS.

How long halt ye between two opinions?—1 Kings xviii. 21.

I EXPECT most of you when you were very small, oh, a *long* time ago, played a game called "Oranges or Lemons." You know how two people make an arch with their hands and everyone else passes under the arch until one is caught and asked in a whisper whether he would like to be an "orange" or a "lemon." If he says "orange" he is sent to one side, and if he says "lemon" he is sent to the other. And so the game goes on until everybody has been caught, and then comes a grand tug of war between the "oranges" and the "lemons."

Now suppose some boy or girl thought they would like to be half an "orange" and half a "lemon"; and suppose they stood in the middle and pulled one side with the right hand, and the other with the left; wouldn't you think they were rather silly? They wouldn't be doing any good to anybody else, and they wouldn't be doing any good to themselves.

And yet there are lots of boys and girls, and men and women too, who are just like that. They can't make up their mind what they will do, or which side they will choose. Sometimes they think they would

like one thing, and the next moment they fancy they would like another. They are the people with lame minds.

These people never make very much progress. They are always hobbling from one foot to the other, so of course they don't get along very fast. They are like the Chinaman who was seen standing at the roadside hacking a piece of log, but never striking it twice in the same place. A passer-by asked him what he was making, and he replied, "Oh, don't know: maybe idol, maybe—bedstead!"

Now I want you to consider some of the things we have to decide about.

1. And the first are the little things of everyday life. When you have sixpence to spend make up your mind what you are going to purchase with it. Of course half the joy of possessing a sixpence is in planning all the things it might buy, and I don't mean you should deprive yourself of that pleasure. But when you have gone into the shop and fixed on something, don't change your mind after the girl has wrapped up your purchase in brown paper and tied a string round it. And if you have to choose between going for a cycle run or playing a game, make up your mind about it and stick to your decision. If you train yourself to be decided about little things now, you won't have so much trouble about the big things later on.

2. Now let us think about some of those bigger things about which we have to decide.

Most of us have to decide sooner or later what we are going to be. Of course when we are quite small we change our minds about that very often. One day we think we shall be an engine-driver, and the next a plasterer, and the next a doctor, and the next a chimney-sweep. And that doesn't really matter much. But when we get into the top classes at school we have to begin to consider the thing seriously. I know a boy who tried five different trades before he finally settled down, and of course he never succeeded in any of them. So if you want to get on you must choose one thing and make up your mind you will stick to it and make a success of it.

3. But there is a bigger choice still than that of choosing a career, and it comes to us every day of our lives—the choice between right and wrong. We have to learn to say "No," and to say it quickly and decidedly; for if we hop about from one foot to the other we are almost sure to choose the wrong.

That lad is bound to reach the top,
His progress no rebuffs can stop,
Who makes his motto ON:
Who when besought to turn astray,
Just reads his motto backward way,
And turns his ON to NO:
This lad, though poor as some church mouse,
May some day dwell in his own house,
And drive his car also.

4. But the biggest thing of all that we have to determine is on whose side we are going to be—on Christ's or Satan's. It is a question we can't get out of deciding,

because if we are not on one side then we are on the other. Some people think they can be on neither side, or a little on each, or half-way between both. But that is quite a mistaken idea.

There was a warrior of old who painted *God* on one side of his shield and the *devil* on the other and added below, "I am ready for either." He was trying to serve both, but it can't be done. If you are not on Christ's side, then you are against Him. Which side are you going to take?

LITTLE THINGS.

A little cloud.—1 Kings xviii. 44 (AV).

WHEN I was staying in the Highlands one summer I met a man whose property had been badly damaged by a cloud-burst. He lived in a farmhouse near the bottom of a steep hill, many miles from a town. Below the farmhouse were a few fields, and beyond the fields flowed a river which some people say is the most beautiful in Scotland. Close beside the farmhouse there was the dried-up rocky bed of a mountain stream which once upon a time must have flowed into the river.

Now, that particular summer was a very wet and disagreeable one, and many of us, I'm afraid, grumbled a good deal about the weather. One day a cloud burst over the top of the mountain and the rain descended in torrents. It found its way into the old bed of the stream, and rushed down with such terrific force that in less than an hour it had cut a trench in the mountain-side so deep that you could have hidden the wall of a house in it. It swept on to the fields at the bottom of the hill ruining the crops, and it ended by carrying away one of the bridges that crossed the river.

We don't very often get such torrents of rain in Scotland, but I think it must have been a storm very

much like this that burst upon Mount Carmel when Elijah sent his servant in such a hurry to tell Ahab to get ready his chariot and hasten back to Jezreel lest the rain should stop him.

You remember that there had been a famine in the land of Samaria for three years because of the drought, and that Elijah went up to the top of Mount Carmel to pray for rain. Six times he sent his servant to a peak overlooking the Mediterranean to search for signs of rain, and six times the young man came back saying that the sky was cloudless. But the seventh time he told Elijah that there was a little cloud away to the west, no bigger than a man's hand. Then the prophet sent him running post haste to tell Ahab to get into his chariot and start for home as quickly as possible lest the floods should stop him. Scarcely had the king set out when the sky was covered with inky clouds the wind blew a hurricane, and the rain descended in torrents. And this great storm grew out of a little cloud no bigger than a man's hand.

I want you to notice that big things nearly always grow out of little things. Big men and women grow out of little boys and girls, big towns grow out of little villages, big trees grow out of little seeds. Sometimes we are apt to think that little things don't matter. But that is a very silly mistake to make. In a way it is really the little things that matter most because they are the beginning and if it weren't for them the big things would never be there.

1. And first will you notice that *big bad things grow out of little bad things.*

Once upon a time there was a town in America which was built of wood, and in this town was a certain shed where cows were kept. One night someone left a lighted lamp in the shed, and a cow kicked over the lamp. Very soon the shed was in a blaze, then the next building caught fire, and the next, and the next, until at last the whole town of Chicago was burnt to the ground. If someone had put out the fire when it began nothing worse might have happened than the destruction of a little straw or a board or two; but as it was a whole town was reduced to ashes.

It is just like that with the little bad things—the little selfishnesses, the little tempers, the little bits of deceit. If we check them at the beginning they are very easily stopped, but if we let them go on there is no saying where they will end, and soon it may be beyond our power to stop them.

2. But there is another side to the "little and big things" question, and the other side is the brighter side. It is that *big good things grow out of little good things.*

Away in far Japan there is a very beautiful place called Nikko, and leading up to this beautiful place there is a wonderful avenue of cedar trees. The avenue is miles in length and some of the trees in it are thirty feet round and two hundred feet high. It is one of the finest sights in Japan, and people come to see it from

all parts of the country. Now, how do you think that wonderful avenue came to be there?

Long ago there lived in Nikko a poor man who had lost somebody he loved very much. It was the custom for the rich men of the place to erect beautiful marble monuments in memory of the friends they had lost, but this poor man had no money to buy marble monuments. He thought and thought, and at last he hit upon a plan. He would build a living monument.

So he set about collecting cedar seeds, and when he had got together a great many he planted them on either side of the road leading to Nikko. After a time the seeds began to grow. Year after year the young trees grew taller and stronger, and now these cedars are the wonder of the whole place.

And the little good things are just like those cedars. You never know what they may grow to. A little task well fulfilled, a little kind word spoken, a little kind deed done may have big consequences that we never dream of. So never think that the little good things are of no account.

And in case you are tempted to lose heart I want to remind you of a little thing that became very great and powerful. When Jesus ascended He left His message in the hands of a very few men. In the first chapter of Acts we read that there were just one hundred and twenty of them—one hundred and twenty men against the whole big world. And yet these men were faithful. They told their friends the things that Jesus had told them, and these friends told their friends. And some

of them went far away into strange countries to tell the news to strange people. To-day millions of people have learned to know and to love Jesus, and the time will yet come when His message will be delivered the wide world over.

So never despise the little things, for they are the things that count. Make up your minds that you will fight the little bad things and conquer them when they are small. Resolve that you will range yourselves on the side of the little good things that grow up into the things that are strong, and wise, and noble.

THE LETTER "I."

I, even I only.—1 Kings xix. 10.

WHAT is your favourite letter of the alphabet? Most of us have a special liking for one letter or another. Some of us like "W" because it is a pretty letter, or "T" because it is an easy letter to write, or "Q" because it is such a curious letter, or "X" because it stands for a kiss. Or we have a special weakness for our own initials whatever they may be. We are so fond of them that we scribble them on every available space and carve them on every possible piece of wood. We even go the length of cutting them out in the turf, or sowing them in cress in the garden.

Now there's not much harm in all that, so long as we take care not to decorate other people's property with our initials; and yet there is a hint of danger in being too fond of your own initials. Shall I tell you why? Because the boy or girl who is always admiring his or her special initials is really adoring the letter "I." And to adore the letter "I" is a very dangerous thing indeed.

Did you ever notice how often some people use the letter "I"? If you just listen and count you will find an "I" at the beginning of nearly every sentence they

utter. Once I remember reading the letter of the wife of a very clever and a very famous man. He was, like all great men, very simple-hearted and very humble-minded, but his wife, who was neither clever nor famous, was quite the reverse, and so in the three and a half pages of that short letter how many "I"s do you think she had? Forty! That was a record, wasn't it?

In to-day's story you find a great prophet using the letter "I" oftener than he should. "I, even I only," said he, and he said it twice. Why did Elijah use the letter "I" too often? He used it too often because he was in despair, and his spirits were as low as they possibly could be. It was the result of the terrible strain he had gone through when he stood alone on Mount Carmel and called upon God to show Himself God before all Israel.

You remember the story — how God answered Elijah's prayer by sending down fire to consume the sacrifice, and how the eight hundred and fifty priests of Baal were slain as a consequence. You would have expected Elijah to be triumphant, wouldn't you? Yes, but Elijah was an "up and down" sort of man, and instead of being triumphant he got very depressed, and saw things black, and said to God, "What is the use of all that happened on Mount Carmel? The people of Israel don't really care. They haven't given up worshipping Baal. There is nobody but me left in all Israel to worship Thee."

Well God told Elijah both by word and by deed that

he was talking very foolishly, and He told him that, so far from his being the only person to worship God in all Israel, there were seven thousand others who had never bowed the knee to Baal, seven thousand besides himself true to Jehovah.

Now why we are too fond of the letter "I" is not usually because we are, like Elijah, in low spirits, so that our self suddenly becomes very important to us. It is usually because we think ourselves very important *all the time.* We can't look at the world and the people in it because we are continually gazing at our own person, and it is filling up the whole of the picture.

A certain well-known philosopher told of himself that when he was quite a little child his father noticed that as he was sitting quietly by the fireside he suddenly tittered. "Herbert," said his father, "what are you laughing at?" "I was thinking," replied Herbert, "how it would have been if there had been nothing besides myself."

That man began to think of himself and forget others when he was a tiny fellow, and the fault grew till, in his old age, life became a weariness and a misery because he could not think of anybody but himself. That was what too great fondness of the letter "I" did for Herbert Spencer. And it not only destroyed his happiness, it destroyed the value of his work; for he wrote the story of his own life and it was written also by other people, and when the world

got to know the conceit and self-importance of the man, they set a much lower value on his books.

Boys and girls, the next time you are tempted to be selfish, or greedy, or boasting, or important, catch yourself up. Change the "I" into "they." Then instead of saying "*I* must come first!" you will find yourself saying "They must come first!" instead of "I'm going to have the sugariest cakes!" "They are going to have the sugariest cakes!" instead of "I'm somebody and they are nobody!" "They are somebody and I am nobody."

And practise what you say. Learn to think of yourself second and other people first. It will be a hard task for some of you, but if you learn it thoroughly it will be the grandest lesson you ever mastered in your life.

And I'll tell you what will help you if you find the learning specially difficult—remembering Jesus Christ, remembering how He said, "Learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart."

If the Son of God was ready to take the lowest place, surely we should be proud and glad and eager to follow in His steps.

BOASTING.

Let not him that girdeth on his armour boast himself as he that putteth it off.—1 Kings xx. 11.

BENHADAD, king of Syria, was a big bully. He had invaded Israel with an army of one hundred and thirty thousand men commanded by thirty-two petty princes. Ahab, king of Israel, had only a small following of seven thousand men and he had shut himself up in the city of Samaria. Benhadad laid siege to the city and when he thought it must be in dire straits, he sent bullying messages to Ahab demanding his wives and his children, his silver and his gold.

At first Ahab was so terrified that he consented. "My lord, O king," he replied, "according to thy saying, I am thine, and all that I have." But when Benhadad, pleased with this success, demanded more and more, Ahab's spirit was roused and he refused to comply.

The king of Syria was angry and he began to threaten and boast. He sent to Ahab saying that he would pound Samaria to dust and that he had so many men with him that if he gave merely a handful of that dust to each of them there would not be enough to go round.

It was then that Ahab replied in the words of our text—"Let not him that girdeth on his armour boast

himself as he that putteth it off." The time to boast he meant, is when you have won the victory.

Well, we know how the story ended. The little army of the Israelites fell upon the Syrians at noon when they were not expecting them. A panic ensued, the Syrians fled pell-mell, and Benhadad took hasty flight upon the first horse he could seize. Like most bullies he was only a coward at heart.

Ahab's words have come down to us as a sort of proverb, and although they were spoken by a very foolish king, they are very wise words. "Let not him that girdeth on his armour boast himself as he that putteth it off." That just means—"if you are going to boast wait till you have something to boast about." And the curious thing is that if you wait till then the chances are you will never boast at all. For it isn't the people who have done big things who brag, but the people who haven't begun to try to do them.

Now I want to give you two reasons why it is well not to boast, and the first is that *boasting, like pride, generally goes before a fall.* The boasting people don't see their own weakness, so of course they don't guard against it and when they are attacked down they come at the first blow. It was like that with Benhadad. He was so very sure of victory that he took his ease and sat down to feast and drink at noon. He never dreamt that the enemy would attack him in the heat of the day. And that was just when the enemy came.

And the second reason is that *boasting is very often*

a sign of weakness. The boys and girls who are always talking about what they can do are generally the ones who accomplish nothing.

Did you ever hear of the rich harper of Tarentum? Tarentum was a city in ancient Greece, and in that city there dwelt a harper who thought very highly of himself. Now a big competition for harpers was going to take place at a town called Delphos, and a laurel crown was to be given to the competitor who played best and sang most sweetly.

The rich harper of Tarentum made up his mind that he would enter the competition. But he thought a laurel crown was a very poor reward for skill in harping, so he resolved that he would go to Delphos crowned already and make a display of his splendour.

Over his shoulders he threw a cape of cloth of gold, and on his head he placed a golden crown set with emeralds. He took a harp inlaid with jewels. He rode in a fine chariot. And all the people admired him.

At last he reached the theatre where the competition was to take place, and the time came when the competitors were called upon to play. When the rich man stepped forward all eyes were turned upon him and the people waited breathlessly till he should begin. But when his fingers smote the harp they brought forth nothing but discord, and when he raised his voice to sing it produced the most hideous sound. The people roared with laughter, the judges drove him from the theatre, and he returned to Tarentum with his gold crown all on one side of his head.

You may have noticed that the boys and girls who boast how brave they would be if they met a wild beast are generally the ones who run away if they meet a barking dog. The really brave people always think they have accomplished nothing. It is always the other fellow who has done it.

We have been talking about foolish boasting, but there is a kind of boasting that is not foolish. You know we all have a battle to fight in this life—a battle against our worst selves, a battle against sin and temptation. And if we go into this fight in our own strength we are sure to be beaten. But if we wear the armour that Christ gives us and put our confidence in Him then we are sure to win.

Do you remember how Goliath came to meet David blustering and boasting about how he was going to give his flesh to the fowls of the air and the beasts of the field? That was one kind of boasting. And David came boasting too, but not in his own strength. "Thou comest to me," he said, "with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield: but I come to thee in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied. This day will the Lord deliver thee into mine hand."

That is the kind of boasting that stands the test, because it is boasting, not in ourselves, but in One who cannot fail. And if we have this confidence it will last us from the day we put on our armour till the day we put it off to exchange it for a crown of victory.

BUSYNESS AND BUSINESS.

And as thy servant was busy here and there, he was gone.—1 Kings xx. 40.

THESE words are part of a parable which was spoken by a prophet to a king who had disobeyed the commands of God.

The parable tells of a man who in the midst of a battle had an important prisoner brought to him. He was told that he must guard that prisoner at all costs, and that, if the captive escaped, his own life should be forfeit.

At first he was most watchful and careful, but by and by he began to weary of his task. The battle was surging past him, men were doing glorious deeds, and here was he condemned to keep guard over a silly old prisoner! Nothing could very well happen to the prisoner right there in the middle of the camp. He would go and strike a blow for freedom and for fame.

So he went. He performed deeds of wonderful valour, and covered himself with glory, and when he returned—the prisoner was gone! The most dangerous enemy of his country had got away, and disaster awaited his people.

Now will you notice something about this man? It

dosen't say he was idle when the prisoner escaped, it dosen't say he was sleeping or playing, it says he was busy. Yes, but he was busy doing something that wasn't his business. It is good to be busy, but it is not good to be busy about the wrong thing, at the wrong time, and in the wrong place.

I daresay that man thought that the work he chose for himself was much finer and grander than the work he had been set t do, but while he was busy doing the thing he had not been asked to do, he failed in the one thing he *had* been asked to do.

I think we can learn two lessons from the story of this soldier who betrayed his trust.

1. We can be disobedient just as much in doing what we are *not told* to do as in doing what we are *told not* to do.

When a sea-captain sets out on a voyage he gets a list of orders from the owner of his vessel. These orders he must obey implicitly and exactly, no matter what happens. The rule is—"Obey orders, if you break owners."

Now, once upon a time the owner of a certain vessel sent the captain with a cargo to the East Indies. The captain had orders as to what kind of cargo he was to bring back. But when he reached his destination and had unloaded, he saw that he would make much more money for his master by bringing back a different cargo from the one he had been told to bring. This he did, and by so doing he made two thousand pounds

more money than he would have done had he obeyed orders.

When he arrived home the owner of the vessel paid him his wages and gave him in addition a handsome present. Then he dismissed him. The captain was astonished, but the owner said, "Sir, I cannot have a man in my service who does not obey orders. This time it turned out well, but next time disobedience might spell ruin."

One of our poets tells the story of a man whom God sent to a river head for a draught of water. But when the man got there he saw that the water was muddy. He also saw lying by the riverside a beautiful marble cup. And he said to himself, "What can God want with a draught of muddy water? All the rivers on the earth are His. I will take Him this beautiful cup instead. It is a much finer gift." But God had asked for the draught of water, not for the marble cup, and the man's gift was valueless.

If you are told to do a thing and do something else instead, no amount of fine or generous things you may do will make up for the omission of the thing you ought to have done. Supposing your mother sends you to buy bread for tea or meat for dinner, and on your way you pass a wood where some beautiful wild flowers grow. You think it would be so nice to bring her a bunch of those, so you stop and fill your basket with them and forget all about your message. Do you think any amount of fine flowers will make up to her for the dinner you didn't bring her?

Don't be ashamed to obey, boys and girls. Be one of those whom others can trust to carry out an order exactly. Such people are scarce in the world—much scarcer than you might think—and when we find one of them we prize him highly.

2. And then I think this story of the unfaithful soldier teaches us that *the duty that lies nearest us is the best for us to do.* If this man had stuck to his post, if he hadn't busied himself about a lot of things he wasn't asked to do, the prisoner would never have got away.

There are a lot of people like that. They are so busy dreaming about the fine things they will do by and by that they miss the opportunity of doing the little, humble, necessary services that lie close at hand.

"To-day," said pretty Dolly, as
She opened wide her eyes,
"I'm going to give my dear mamma
A beautiful surprise.
I hardly know what it will be,
But I will find a way
To do some great and noble thing
To please mamma to-day.

"I'm tired of doing *little* things,
Why, any one can sweep
And dust, or wipe the dishes up,
Or watch the baby sleep.
It's some *big* thing I want to do.
If I could write a book,
Or save the house from burning, now
How pleased mamma would look!"

So after breakfast Dolly went
And sat beside the fire,
While mother cleared the things away,
And mended baby's tire;
She wiped the dishes, made the beds,
And braided Bessy's hair,
While Dolly sat and pondered long
Within her easy chair.

And so she dreamed and thought and planned
The busy morning through;
But could not think of anything
Quite big enough to do!
And when she went to bed at night
She really wondered why,
When mother kissed her lovingly,
The kiss was half a sigh![1]

Boys and girls, take your heads out of the clouds. It isn't the doing of the far-away, big things that is the finest work for you, it is the doing well of the little things that lie nearest you. If you neglect these little things, however commonplace they may seem, then you have failed in your duty, and no amount of grand deeds will ever take their place.

If you are not helpful and dutiful and loving to your father and mother, kind and courteous to your brothers and sisters, faithful in your work, then none of the fine, brave things you imagine you are going to do in the world will ever make up. God gives most of us just very commonplace tasks, but He expects us to do them well. We must see to it that we do

[1] G. M. Cannon.

thoroughly the little bit of work He puts before us, and some day perhaps He will call us to something bigger.

Just one thing more. The man in the story was too busy to do the thing that mattered most. And there are still some foolish people who are too busy to do the thing that matters most of all—to make room in their lives for God.

Boys and girls, don't make that mistake. It is the biggest one you could possibly make. Let God into your hearts now, while they are young and free and generous, and before other interests come in to crowd Him out. He is worthy of your heart's adoration, of your life's service, but He will never force Himself in. Will you open the door of your heart and give Him an entrance? It will never be easier for you to do it than now, and you will never regret it.

CHEATING GOD.

And the king of Israel said, . . . I will disguise myself, and go into the battle . . . . And a certain man drew his bow at a venture, and smote the king of Israel between the joints of the harness.—1 Kings xxii. 30, 34.

Do you ever play at dressing-up? Of course you do. It is one of your favourite games. You girls love to get hold of some grown-up clothes. You parade up and down in your borrowed finery, tripping over your long skirts, but admiring yourself tremendously all the while. And you boys are not above the game of dressing-up either. When you were very tiny the gift of a soldier's outfit in miniature made you happy for days, especially if the outfit included a sword or a drum.

What is half the charm of being a boy scout? Is it not just the wearing of that fascinating scout hat? And is not half the pleasure of being a girl guide the donning of that smart blue uniform?

Dressing-up is a game that never loses its freshness. And it is a game played not only by boys and girls. It is a game played for our amusement by actors and actresses. It is a game played in grim earnest by the men of our Secret Service Department. To be able by dressing-up to disguise themselves and appear as other

people is absolutely necessary for them. It means the safety of the messages they carry, and it often means the safety of their own lives.

Our story to-day is the story of a king who dressed up to save his life. But it was not man that he was trying to deceive, it was God.

His name was Ahab. He was king of the Northern Kingdom of Israel, and a very splendid and mighty monarch he was in some ways. He was a brave warrior and an energetic ruler, and he strove hard to make his nation powerful and famous. He was a great builder too. He built a marvellous palace of ivory—the like of which never before was seen. He built also a beautiful temple.

And that brings us to the weak point in his character. For, alas! King Ahab's beautiful temple was not built in honour of God. It was built in honour of the false god Baal. Ahab knew perfectly that God was the one and only true God, and yet he built a temple to Baal because his wife wanted him to do it. She was a heathen princess called Jezebel, and matters stood like this. Ahab ruled Israel, but Jezebel ruled Ahab. And although Ahab knew he was doing wrong, he stifled his conscience and went on doing it.

God gave him chance after chance to change his wicked ways. God sent him Elijah, one of the greatest prophets in Bible history, to warn him to repent. But Ahab deliberately closed his ears to Elijah's messages, and went on sinning and teaching his foolish people to imitate his sins and worship idols too.

It fell on a day that Ahab had a State visit from his neighbour the good king Jehoshaphat, the king of the Southern Kingdom of Judah. King Jehoshaphat's son had married King Ahab's daughter, so the two kings were related by marriage.

Now, some time previously King Ahab had been at war with Benhadad, the king of Syria. Ahab had beaten Benhadad and Benhadad had solemnly promised, as the price of peace, to return to Israel certain cities which Benhadad's father had seized in an earlier war. But Benhadad had failed to return one city called Ramoth-gilead. So Ahab suggested to Jehoshaphat that, now that they were united by marriage, they might be united in warfare too. He asked Jehoshaphat to be his ally and go with him to fight the king of Syria and regain Ramoth-gilead. Jehoshaphat was quite willing to help, but he said to Ahab that it would be well to inquire of God if He approved, and if their plans would be successful.

Now Ahab was not sure if God *would* approve of their plans, and he was afraid to hear what God might have to say on the subject, so he gathered together four hundred prophets who, he knew, would prophesy what he desired—a good ending to the war. But he purposely did not send for the one prophet who, he knew, would speak the truth at all costs—a prophet named Micaiah.

Jehoshaphat somehow was not satisfied with the fair promises of the four hundred who all foretold a great victory. Their words were too fair. So he asked

Ahab if there were not still another prophet in Israel. "Yes," said Ahab, "there is. But I hate him, for he prophesies evil about me, not good." But Jehoshaphat pleaded that Micaiah also should be consulted, and so he came before the king. And, as Ahab feared, he told the truth; and a very unpleasant truth it sounded, for he said that Ahab would be killed, and his army would have to retreat.

Naturally Ahab was rather upset at such a terrible prophecy, but he went on with his preparations; and he and Jehoshaphat went up to Ramoth-gilead. There Ahab did what he thought a clever thing. He dressed up as a common soldier and went into battle disguised instead of wearing his kingly robes. It wasn't that he was a coward. Not a bit of it! But he thought that if he were dressed as another man than the king of Israel, God would not know him, and the prophecy would not come true.

Now, as it happened, Benhadad had set apart certain of the mightiest men expressly to look for Ahab. They had orders to seek him out and fight with him only. When these men saw Jehoshaphat in his kingly armour they mistook him for Ahab, and for a time they pursued him; but by and by they found out their mistake and stopped the chase.

Meantime a common soldier, who had been aiming at nobody in particular, shot an arrow into the crowd on the battlefield, and that arrow sped straight for the disguised king and pierced between the joints of his armour. It pierced so deep that Ahab knew he was

dying. Then he did a brave thing. He got his men to prop him up in his chariot whilst the battle swayed to and fro. But at sunset he died and a cry rose from the hosts of Israel, "Back to your homes and your cities!" So the people retreated and Micaiah's prophecy was fulfilled.

Now I think the story of Ahab tells us two things.

1. The first is that *we cannot deceive God.* We cannot cheat Him as we can cheat our fellow-men. Whatever we wear, and whatever we may be doing or saying, God sees the real us. He knows when we are saying one thing aloud and thinking another secretly. He does not look at what we appear, He looks at what we are. He looks straight into our hearts where our motives and intentions are hidden, and He sees them and not the deed that the outside world sees. And it is the motive or intention that God gives us credit for, not the outward deed.

Once there was a certain man who dropped half a sovereign instead of a sixpence into the collection bag. He was greatly concerned about it, and actually went the length of trying, after service, to recover it. But the man in charge of the collection rebuked him, and told him that what had been given to God should not be asked back again. "Oh! well," said the mean man, "I'll get credit for it in heaven." "Will you?" said the other. "No, you'll get credit only for the sixpence you intended to give." It sounded rather hard, but it was true. You can never cheat God.

2. The second thing the story of Ahab tells us is that *there is no such thing as chance.* Everything is ordered by God.

When George Washington was a little fellow (this is not the axe story!) he ran out to the garden one spring morning and stood in amazement before a bed of cabbages whose tiny green shoots formed the letters of his own name, "George Washington."

"Father, father!" he shouted, "do come and see this!"

"What is the matter?" asked his father.

"The cabbages are coming up and writing my name!" cried George.

"Very curious!" said his father.

"But who did it?" asked the boy.

"I suppose they just grew so," said his father. "Don't you think they came up that way by chance?"

"Oh they couldn't!" said George. "They couldn't possibly grow that way unless someone had made them."

"Right, my boy," said the father. "I planted these cabbages like that just to show you that nothing grows by chance. There is someone who plans everything."

No, boys and girls, there is no such thing as chance. There is someone behind everything. Everything is the result of order. And God is behind that order.

THE LITTLE WORD "BUT."

But he was a leper.—2 Kings v. 1.

SOME little words may mean a great deal. "But" is one of them. Many things have been said about it—"The little word that spoils the music"; "The word that has the knack of spoiling things," etc. "But" has a bad character. And indeed it is in this light generally think of it. It drops into speech at every turn; we seem to have heard it all our lives—"Jack is a fine fellow, but——"

1. It certainly spoilt the music of Naaman's life. We are told of his greatness—he was a great captain, a favourite of the king, and famous because of the victories he had won. Wealth, titles—Naaman had everything but one to place him among the proudest and happiest of men.

But what did it matter though he had a great position, much popularity, and the favour of the king, when all the time he was suffering from one of the most loathsome of diseases? "But he was a leper." That "but" was sufficient to shut out all brightness and hope from his life.

Naaman must have been a brave man—a "plucky" man, as we say sometimes. Think what it must have

meant to keep doing his work in spite of such a terrible handicap. Every year the disease would gain a stronger hold on his body. He was like a soldier who carried a golden shield, beautiful to the world, but to the soldier himself picturing something that made him sad whenever he looked at it.

I once knew a poor little girl who had a "but" in her life. It was not the want of pretty clothes, nor was it the fact that she sometimes got very small dinners. No one played games with greater spirit than she did: she jumped about the school playground as merrily as any. But at home in the evenings there was often something to make her little heart sad. Her mother looked sorrowful and careworn. Father drank, and when he came in he said very unkind things to everybody. She often cried at such times; but next day she would be as bright as ever. And the "but" in that girl's life helped to make her a woman full of sympathy for those who did wrong.

Let me tell you of a little boy who lived in a grand house. He had everything about him to make his life happy. If you had seen his room, you would have said, "I wish I had all the toys I see lying about." But you would have felt sorry for the owner of them. He could not rise from his little bed in the corner; for he took hip joint disease when he was quite a wee fellow. His "but," like that of the little girl, was doing a splendid thing for him; it was making him a brave soldier. Even if he could not fight, he had become "plucky" like the Syrian captain. Grown-up

people used to come and sit beside him sometimes, they felt that the sight of that little boy's courage did them good.

There are "buts," however, that boys and girls are better without. We need to remember these when we say our prayers. "Annie is a clever girl, but *so* careless." Carelessness may lead to sin. "Frank is a likeable boy, *but* you can never quite depend on what he says." A tendency to untruthfulness means that the boy or girl who has it is on the road to become a deceiver. I like to think of a boy I heard of, who was very ambitious to get to the top of his class. He was the youngest in the class. His teacher told a friend that one day she asked the boys to spell a somewhat unusual word. One after another they missed it Then it came to Alec's turn. He made his attempt and the teacher said, "Right! go up," and feeling very proud he marched to the position he had coveted. Then the teacher said, "I shall write it on the blackboard for you all to see." As she wrote, Alec watched. Presently he saw the letters "I.E." Without a moment's hesitation he cried, "Oh, I said 'E.I.'," and down he walked to his old position. His teacher felt proud of him: she knew what it had cost him, and that he would be feeling that it made him look small in the eyes of his classmates. But doing the right thing would in time become easy to Alec, for God would help him.

A true follower of Jesus Christ should have no "but" in his character. Your companions may be

ready with their "buts" when they speak of you, but if you ask God to help you to be like Jesus Christ, it is only God's judgment you have to think of. When a great and good man was newly buried, an onlooker said, "Here lies one who never feared the face of man." He had lived as in the presence of God. Boys and girls, remember that.

SOME GREAT THING.

If the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it?—2 Kings v. 13.

HERE is a man who was told to do a little thing and found it more difficult than doing a big one. It seems stupid, doesn't it? You think it would have been so easy for him to go and bathe in Jordan, and that he would have been glad to do it to be made well again. But it was just because it was so easy that he couldn't do it.

You see Naaman was a very great man in his own country and much thought of. He had travelled hundreds of miles to see Elisha. He was accompanied by a grand escort and had brought many valuable presents, and he thought the prophet would make a great fuss over him. But Elisha did not even come to see him. He just sent a messenger to tell him to dip seven times in the river Jordan.

I suppose Naaman fancied Elisha was slighting him or making fun of him, so he was angry and would not go to the Jordan. If he had been asked to do something big, or difficult, or heroic, he could have done it, but he would not do the little, simple, commonplace thing. Fortunately he thought better of his decision

and, on the advice of his followers, went and dipped in Jordan and was made whole.

I wonder if we are ever like Naaman. Yes, I'm afraid we are sometimes. We like to do the big things, the things that make a noise and a show, and we think the little, quiet, everyday things are not worth doing. Now that is a foolish and mistaken idea and a great many grown-up people have caused themselves and others much unhappiness by cherishing it. I should like you to start right by never letting it into your head at all, so I want you to try and remember three facts about little things.

1. First, remember *it is the little things that make up life.*—Perhaps you will never be required to do a great thing, a thing that the world will hear about and talk about, but you will be called to do hundreds and thousands of little things, little everyday tasks that nobody sees or applauds, and it is the doing of those trifles, especially the way you do them, that goes to form that wonderful building we call character.

Did you ever hear how the beautiful cathedral of St. Paul's in London came to be built? Did you know that it was built of sixpences? That seems queer, doesn't it? Shall I tell you how it happened?

Long ago, when it was settled that the cathedral was to be built, a tax of sixpence was put on each ton of coal which was brought into the port, and the money that was gained in this way went to pay for the building of the cathedral. Just one little sixpence

after another, each one of very little value, and yet they helped to erect one of the grandest buildings in the world! Your life may be just as grand and noble as St. Paul's Cathedral, and yet it may be built out of small things as the cathedral was.

2. But, second, *sometimes it is the little things that are the big things.*—Now what do we mean by that? Well it is often easier to do a fine, heroic thing once in a while than to do the little commonplace, dull things of everyday life.

Can you control your temper? That may seem a little thing, but it is a big thing. Can you be kind and patient, day after day, when other people are annoying? Can you learn that wearisome lesson, or toil through that dull task without grumbling? Can you give up little pleasures now and again for the sake of somebody else and do it with a smile?

Do you think there is nothing grand about all that? There are few things grander! It isn't easy to be a hero in everyday life when nobody seems to be looking on and there is nobody to applaud. But God is looking on and I think one of the surprises we shall get in heaven will be to know what God counts little and what He counts big.

3. Once more, I want you to remember that it doesn't matter whether things seem big or little, important or unimportant; if they lie in our path, God has put them there for us to do and *it is our business to do them.*

I was reading a sort of parable the other day about a boy who wanted to do big things and who omitted to do the little thing that lay nearest and that mattered most just then. His dream was to go out into the world and give his life to doing good works among the poor and needy. Well, that was a very good ambition, but he made one mistake, as you shall hear.

One night as he knelt in prayer asking that the opportunity might be given him to carry out his desires an angel appeared to him, and in his hand was a beautiful amethyst ring. The angel told the boy that his prayers had been answered, that he was to go out into the world to do good works, but that there was a bit of work close at hand that badly needed doing, and when he had finished that he should find the amethyst ring.

Next morning he told his mother about the angel's visit and that he must go forth that day to begin his life of charity. She gave him her blessing and told him to go. "But," she added, "there is just one thing I should like you to do before you leave. That stagnant pool in front of the cottage has been smelling very badly lately. It is overpowering the scent of the roses and the honeysuckle, and I am afraid it may breed some plague. I should like you to remove it before you set out."

The boy replied that he had no time to stay, and that he was sure clearing out the pool would make him feel ill. So he went away without removing it.

For many years he travelled up and down the land, and everywhere he went he did good works. Many were helped and blessed by him, and he earned a great name. At last, one day he came again to his mother's village. But he found the cottage in ruins and was told that his mother had died long since. When he asked the neighbours how she died, they replied that she had succumbed to a plague caused by the cesspool in front of her cottage, and that many more people in the village had died of the same trouble. The cesspool had since been covered over, but some people thought it should be removed altogether.

Then the man remembered his mother's request and he was exceedingly sorry. He set to work that day to remove the pool, and at the bottom he found the wonderful amethyst ring.

So don't think that what you do or don't do doesn't count. The duty that is nearest, however commonplace and trifling it may seem, is the most important one for you. If you do it the world will be so much the happier and better; if you fail to do it it will be so much the poorer.

One stitch dropped as the weaver drove
His needle shuttle to and fro,
In and out, beneath, above,
Till the pattern seemed to bud and grow
As if the fairies had helping been;
And the one stitch dropped pulled the next stitch out,
And a weak place grew in the fabric stout;
And the perfect pattern was marred for aye
By the one small stitch that was dropped that day.

One small life in God's great plan,
How futile it seems as the ages roll,
Do what it may, or strive how it can,
To alter the sweep of the infinite whole!
A single stitch in an endless web;
A drop in the ocean's flow and ebb;
But the pattern is rent where the stitch is lost,
Or marred where the tangled threads have crossed;
And each life that fails of the true intent,
Mars the perfect plan that its Master meant.[1]

[1] Susan Coolidge.

SEEING THE UNSEEN.

Lord, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see.—2 Kings vi. 17.

How much do you see? Do you see half of what is to be seen? Or all that is to be seen? Or more than is to be seen? These are the three kinds of eyesight, and you must have one or other of the three.

1. Perhaps the greatest number of people in the world have the first kind of eyesight. They see only the half of what is to be seen. They look, for instance, at a flower, but they don't really see it. If you asked them to draw it for you or describe it to you, ten chances to one they would give it seven petals instead of five, and those petals would not be the correct shape. Then they would make it grow on a wrong stem, and the leaves would be smooth instead of hairy. These people had looked but they had not noticed; and noticing is the better half of seeing.

About the middle of last century there lived a very famous Swiss professor called Agassiz. He was a great student of Natural History, and among the subjects that he studied most closely was the life history of the fish. He knew all that there was to know about the fishes that live in our day and the fishes that lived in the days before man was.

It is told of him that he used to give a fish to one

of his students and tell him to take it away and study it for a while. When the student came back Agassiz would ask him what he had seen about the fish. The student would say he had seen this and that, and Agassiz would ask, "What else?" The student would come at last to the end of what he had seen, but Agassiz would send him back to study the creature again. A second time the student would return and Agassiz would ask what he had seen now, and the student would reply he had noticed this and that besides. And again, when he had come to the end of what he had seen, Agassiz would send him back to look a third time; and so on—till the student was astonished to know how much there was to see in an ordinary fish. "Ah!" Agassiz would say, "it has been there all the time but you didn't look close enough to discover it."

2. The second kind of eyesight is the eyesight that sees all that is to be seen. It notices and remembers. It sees an object and it immediately stores up a little picture of that object with every detail complete. It is a very valuable kind of eyesight, and the hopeful thing about it is that if you haven't got it naturally, you can train yourself to have it.

Have any of you read Kipling's book, *Kim*? The story tells how Kim, when a boy, was trained to have the eyesight that notices. He was sent up to Simla and there he was put in charge of an extraordinary man, called Lurgan Sahib, who taught him how to see. Kim and a little native lad were set to play what they

called "the jewel game." Lurgan Sahib would make a collection of small objects, such as precious stones, and he would give both boys a look at them, and then he would ask them to describe the stones from memory. At first the little Hindu boy always beat Kim at the game. But in the end Kim learned to play the game of noticing so magnificently that when he grew older he was able to do most valuable work for the British Government.

Boys and girls, train yourselves to notice. The world is rich in exquisite details if only we open our eyes to see them.

3. But the third kind of eyesight is the most important as it is the most precious. It is the eyesight of our text—the eyesight that sees the unseen.

The text is a prayer of the prophet Elisha. At this time Elisha's life was in great danger from the king of Syria. The king of Syria, who was Israel's enemy, had discovered that the most private plans he made to surprise the Israelites were foiled by Elisha. Not that Elisha spied! But God allowed him to know all the Syrians' plans, and he told them to the king of Israel. So the king of Syria sent a special force to capture the prophet, who was then living in Dothan, a city twelve miles north of Samaria.

During the darkness of one night the Syrians stealthily and noiselessly surrounded the city, which was built on a mound. There they were discovered in the grey dawn of the morning by Elisha's servant, who rushed in terror to his master, crying, "Alas, my

master! how shall we do?" He was sure that their last hour had come. But the prophet only smiled quietly. "Fear not," said he, "for they that be with us are more than they that be with them." And then he prayed "Lord, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see."

And the next moment the young man was crying out, not in terror but in amazement, for, round about the city, encircling it more closely even than the Syrians, was a host of chariots and horses of fire. The Syrians were still there, but the young man saw that something greater than the Syrians lay between them and his master. God Himself had sent His legions to protect and shield His prophet. God had not deserted them. He was with them in the danger.

Now the eyesight that God gave to that young man is the eyesight I want you to have—the eyesight that sees God and God's love in everything.

When Jean François Millet, the great French artist, was a little fellow, he and his father stood on the cliffs one night to watch the sunset. The wonderful crimson of the sky and the golden glory of the sea made François cry out with delight. But his father stood still and bared his head. "My son," said he, "it is God."

Boys and girls, I want you to see in all the happenings of your life, the beautiful things and the glad things—ay, and the perplexing things and the sad things—God Himself—God giving, God guiding, God loving. For if we see God with the eyes of faith here below, we shall be getting ready to see Him as He is by and by, when He takes us to live with Him for ever.

THE KING'S CROWN.

Then he brought out the king's son, and put the crown upon him.—2 Kings xi. 12.

DID you ever notice how many different kinds of crowns are mentioned in the Bible? There are the king's crown, and the priest's crown, and the victor's crown. There is the crown of thorns which Jesus wore. And besides these we read of a "crown of glory," a "crown of righteousness," and a "crown of life."

Now you know that a crown is not just a mere meaningless ornament like a necklace or a bracelet. It stands for power, or honour, or victory, or consecration. It is the sign or symbol, as we say, of something else. And so I should like to tell you about some of these crowns—what they stand for, and how we too can wear them.

I think we shall begin with the king's crown, because it is the one we all know best. The king's crown has had rather a curious history. First of all it was just a band or fillet of silk or linen which was bound round the head and fastened behind. Such a fillet was worn as a badge of royalty by the Persian monarchs. The Greeks called it *diadema* which just means "something bound round"; and it is from this

Greek word that our English word "diadem" comes Sometimes these royal fillets were beautifully embroidered or even studded with jewels, but they must have looked very different from the crowns we know.

From the Persians the custom of wearing this royal badge spread to other nations, and it was most probably with just such a fillet that the little king in our text was crowned. Some people say that this was also the form of the diadems of our own early Saxon kings.

By and by a band of gold took the place of the band of silk or linen. Then by degrees ornaments were added, and additions were made to this plain band, until at last it grew into the crown as we know it.

Now perhaps you may think that all this is quite interesting, but it hasn't got very much to do with you or me. We are not born kings, you say, we are just very plain, ordinary, everyday sort of people, and we shall never have the chance of wearing a crown.

Well, let me tell you a secret. You are not born a king, but you are born *to be* a king. That is what God meant you to be, and it depends on yourself whether you will be one or not. Shall I tell you the name of the kingdom over which you are called to rule? It is the kingdom of Self, and that is a very big and difficult kingdom to control.

Some people are quite content to be slaves instead of kings. They let Self rule them instead of ruling Self. They are like the lion in a story I read the other day that wanted to turn things upside down.

Long, long ago there stood at the gate of a walled city a beautiful statue. It was carved in marble and it represented a man and a lion. The man was standing with his foot on the lion to show that he had conquered it. But one day, so the story goes, a real live lion came past that way. He stopped to look at the statue and this is what he growled: "Silly sort of idea that; but it's just like these humans! Now if *I* had carved that statue, I'd have had the man lying down and the lion with his paw on him." And so I daresay he would!

But you see we are not meant to let the lion or any other kind of beast get the better of us, you and I; we are meant to get the better of them. We are not meant to let our angry passions, or our selfish wishes, or our bad desires conquer us; we are meant to conquer them. We are not called to be slaves, we are called to be kings and conquerors.

But there is one thing we must remember, boys and girls. If we want to be kings and queens, real kings and queens, we must have the kingly heart.

Once the soldiers of Alexander the Great complained to him that one of his generals, Antipater, did not dress grandly enough. They themselves were decked out in the purple of conquerors, but he was plainly and soberly clad. And what do you think Alexander replied? "Antipater," he said, "is all purple within." Antipater wore the royal colour, the colour of the conqueror, on his heart; he had the noble, kingly

heart, and that counted for far more than outward show.

And where can we get this kingly heart? From the King of kings and from Him alone. On the reverse side of gold and silver articles there used to be stamped a likeness of the head of the reigning sovereign. That showed that duty had been paid to him. Boys and girls, if we want to carry the kingly heart, then we must ask the King of kings to stamp His likeness on us. Then, and only then, shall we be fit to wear the royal crown.[1]

[1] The texts of the other sermons in this series are Exod. xxxix. 30, John xix. 2, 1 Cor. ix. 25.

MONEY-BOXES.

Jehoiada the priest took a chest, and bored a hole in the lid of it.—2 Kings xii. 9.

DID you know that a money-box was mentioned in the Bible?—one with a hole in the lid too! You will find all about it in the twelfth chapter of the Second Book of Kings. If you look at the ninth verse you will see that "Jehoiada the priest took a chest, and bored a hole in the lid of it, and set it beside the altar, on the right side as one cometh into the house of the Lord: and the priests that kept the door put therein all the money that was brought into the house of the Lord." The chest with the hole in the lid was a kind of collection plate. It stood in the Temple, and the people gave the priests their offerings to put into it. When it was full it was carried away to the palace of the king himself, and the high priest and the king's chancellor opened it there, and counted the offerings in the chest, and tied them up in bags. Then they used the money to pay for repairing and beautifying the Temple, which at that time was sadly in need of repair.

Now, our text makes us think of money-boxes and savings-banks, and I want to talk to you about them

for a little while this morning. If you come to think of it there are just three things you can do with your money.

1. The first thing is—spend it. That is the shortest way to dispose of it. You keep it only long enough to see whether it is a penny or a sixpence, and then you fly along to the nearest shop and buy something with it, and you don't see that penny or that sixpence any more.

2. The second thing is—save it. You put the penny or the sixpence into your savings-bank. At first sight this does not seem at all a nice way to dispose of your money. In fact you grudge horribly hiding it away in a box, and you drop it very slowly into the hole, especially if the box is one that needs to be broken before you can get the money out again. Putting the money in there makes it feel so horribly safe. Yes, but then it *is* safe, and you look forward to the day when you will see it once more. And as the bank grows heavier you begin to be keener on adding to its store, and you grow rather proud of it, and try to count up how much there is inside. It is quite easy to remember that one half-crown and those three shillings, but the sixpences are rather difficult, and when you come to the pennies you get dreadfully mixed and give it up.

At last the glorious day arrives when the box is to be opened. Father or mother does it for you; and as you watch the coins tumble in a heap on the table, and as you pile them up, each after its kind, till the penny

pile threatens to topple over, you feel it has been worth denying yourself all those little things you might have bought, for now you will be able to buy something of real value.

If you haven't got a savings-bank already, start one as soon as you can. It is a grand habit to be able to deny yourself to-day for the sake of to-morrow. Of course I don't ask you to drop in every penny and every sixpence. I don't wish you to grow greedy of money or mean in spending it. That would be ten times worse than spending your money foolishly.

3. But there is a third thing you can do with your money, and it is better than spending it or saving it. You can put it in God's bank. What! Has God a savings-bank? Certainly He has. And every penny you give away to others goes straight into it. By giving it away you are not losing it, you are just giving it to God to keep. That sounds wonderful, but it is true. It is a splendid thing to have a savings-bank on the dining-room mantelpiece, but it is far more splendid to have a savings-bank in heaven. The money that we give to others from love or pity, we do not see again on earth, but God treasures it; and one day, when we go to live with Him, He will tell us how much we have in His savings-bank. And won't we be ashamed, and try to hide our faces, if the sum He mentions is very very small?

But we must not run away with the idea that God despises small sums. You see, He counts quite differently from us. Suppose you have only a penny,

and you are looking forward to spending it on something you specially want, and suppose you give it away instead of spending it on yourself—you must not think that God will count that penny a sum too small to notice. Not a bit of it! He will count it as much as if you had had ten shillings and had given every one of the ten away. You see you gave what you could—your all.

But it is not only money that God wishes you to put in His bank. He wishes you to put in kind thoughts and loving deeds. All these count as coin in God's money-box. So if you come out of a sweet-shop with a bag of sweets in your pocket and you see two little boys outside gluing their noses against the pane and choosing what they would buy if only they had a penny, don't forget to give them a good half of your bag of sweets. That will be so much in God's bank.

Or if mother is looking tired out, and you have half an hour between lessons and bedtime, offer to run her errands or help her somehow. That will be dropping a sixpence in God's bank. You see there are hundreds of ways you can invest in it.

Let me tell you a story to finish. It is a really true story, and it happened not long ago.

On the outskirts of a certain great city there lived a little boy called Jimmie. His father was dead, but he had a mother and a small brother named Bobbie and a tiny baby sister. They were all very poor, so poor that

Jimmie had often no shoes to cover his feet, and very little bread to fill his hungry mouth. By and by things grew worse, for his mother became ill, and could not work any longer. Then, just when things were desperate, something happened. An angel came to the house. At least she looked like an angel to Jimmie. She wore a grey cloak with sleeves like floating wings, and she had a bonnet with a long grey veil, and beneath the bonnet was a face—oh! so sweet. And she smiled at Jimmie and called him "old man." She asked him if he knew the way to such-and-such a street in the city. Jimmie did. Then she told him that she had come to spend the afternoon with his mother, but that she wished to send a message to a certain house in that street. Would Jimmie take it? Of course Jimmie would. Then she took a look at Jimmie's bare red feet which he was rubbing one on the other to keep them warm, and she drew sixpence out of her purse, and she said, "It's a long road, and you've no shoes, and there is snow on the ground; here's sixpence for you. Take the car!"

Jimmie sped off like an arrow, and mounted the car steps, and paid his threepenny fare like a man; and wasn't he just proud! When he reached the street, he found the house and delivered the message, and then he started out for home. Now something was worrying Jimmie—and it was that neither Bobbie nor Baby was sharing his treat. He wanted them to have a good time too. Just then he passed in front of one of those shops where cakes and biscuits and toys and

sweets are gloriously mixed in the window. And suddenly Jimmie knew what he should do. Said he to himself, "I'll run all the way home, and may be it won't hurt so awful, and then Bobbie can have that penny whistle, and Baby will get that penny ball, and there'll be a penny over to buy a ha'penny cake for each of them." So he marched into the shop and bought the penny whistle, and the penny ball, and the two ha'penny cakes. And the woman actually put the cakes in a bag, and he stowed away the toys in the only one of his pockets that hadn't holes. Then he ran all the road home, and whenever he stopped to take breath he had a peep into the bag and a peep into his pocket to be sure the things were still there. And when he got home, very hot and breathless, and showed the angel in the bonnet what he had done, and hoped she wouldn't be angry, she only smiled all the sweeter and said "Dear laddie, no." As for Bobbie and Baby! You should have seen them! That's all!

Now Jimmie invested that day in God's bank. He invested not only three pennies but a great deal of love. And that is what God wants even more than pennies.

Boys and girls, make up your mind to-day that, however small, however empty your savings-bank on earth may be, your savings-bank in heaven will, please God, be both large and full.

A "RELIABLE" STORY.

"They reckoned not with the men, into whose hand they delivered the money . . . for they dealt faithfully."—2 Kings xii. 15.

WHEN your house is going to be papered and painted what happens? Well, first father pays a visit to the painter and asks him to send a man to look at the rooms and measure the walls. Then you get up great heavy books with patterns of wall paper, and you choose the paper you think most suitable. And father tells the painter the paper you have fixed on, and then the painter sends in what is called an "estimate"—that is, a note saying how much he estimates or figures out that the painting and papering will cost. If father thinks the estimate reasonable he orders the work to proceed, and the painters with their pots and their brushes and their ladders arrive on the scene. Some time after they have finished their job the master painter sends in his bill, and father compares it with the estimate which he received before the job was begun. If the bill is larger than the estimate, or if there is what father considers an unreasonable charge, he goes to the painter and speaks about it before he pays the bill.

That is the way people usually do business nowadays, but occasionally you hear someone say, "Oh! I never ask

So-and-so for an estimate. He is such a decent man I know I can trust him to do it as well and economically as it can be done. He is thoroughly reliable." You feel that that workman must be well worth employing—don't you?—if people say such nice things about him.

Well, the men of to-day's text are all of the reliable order. Those who were arranging for the repair of the Temple trusted them so thoroughly that they handed over to them all the money which had been gathered for the Temple repairs. They told these overseers to lay it out to the best advantage, knowing that the men would act honestly and faithfully, and do with the money the utmost that could be done. There would be no scamped work allowed either. There would be no building with rubble and calling it stone, there would be no cheating with the woodwork—no putting in of inferior or unseasoned wood. Everything would be as perfect as it could be made.

Boys and girls, it is a fine reputation these men bore. And it is a reputation we can all have if we care. The matter lies entirely in our own hands. Nobody but ourselves can make us reliable. It is our honour alone that can command us here.

And if there be reasons needed why we should be reliable, here are three.

1. *Only what is reliable is useful.*—The bicycle you ride every day must have a stout frame, and good tyres, and a strong brake. There must be nothing shaky about it. For the bicycle that may break down at any minute is of little value. The tools that snap when you use them, the

needles that bend or break when you ask them to go through stiff material, are worse than useless. They are a downright nuisance. And it is the same with the men and women, the boys and girls, who cannot be relied on.

A man who sold fruit and vegetables from a cart in the city streets carried always in the back of the cart a queer-looking little mongrel dog. It was no beauty, looked at from a doggy point of view. Its legs were much too long, its head was too broad, its coat was too rough, and its left ear was sadly torn; but its master would not have parted with it at any price. "Trusty," said he, "has saved me pounds and pounds. Before I got him I used to lose a great deal of money from people helping themselves to my goods whilst I was bargaining with somebody else. I tried a boy to watch the cart, but he was no use, for he ate the apples and plums himself. Then I got Trusty here. Since then I've had no trouble. I can rely on him. He never fails me."

2. The second reason is that *what is reliable always comes out on top.*—Reliable people are like cream on milk. They always rise to the top and they are always in great demand. If it is known that you can be thoroughly trusted you are sure to get on in life. There are always more positions of trust than there are trusty people to fill them; so the trusty man wins every time. If you are setting out with the idea of being somebody in the world, be clever if you like, but first be reliable. Clever people who are not reliable are like rockets. They go up with a great show, but they don't stay long aloft. They are only poor imitations of a

star. If you want to be a star, if you want to shine up high with a steady radiance, you must be reliable as well as clever.

3. The third reason is that *to be reliable is the only right way.*—It is the only way for the boys and girls who are trying to follow Christ. Those who say they will do a certain thing and do not do it, those who make large promises and never fulfil them, are little better than liars. Those who scamp their work, or fritter away their master's time, are really thieves. They are untrue to the name they bear.

In the beautiful city of Florence there stands a wonderful cathedral with a lofty dome like St. Paul's. The dome has many gorgeous stained-glass windows, but perhaps the most remarkable thing about it is a tiny iron ring in the casement of one of these windows, for by it the uprightness and downrightness of the whole building is tested year by year. On a certain day in June, at a certain hour of that day, the sun shines through that ring, and its rays fall on a brass star let into the marble pavement beneath. So long as the sun falls exactly on that spot people know that the building is as erect and sound as it was the day it was finished. If the rays failed to fall exactly on that spot then they would know that the cathedral was beginning to be off the straight, that it was in danger of toppling or becoming like the leaning tower of Pisa.

Boys and girls, our reliableness is just our iron ring. It tests the uprightness of our character. It proves the truth of our love for Christ.

GOD'S GIFTS AND OURS.

All things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee.—1 Chron. xxix. 14.

THIS is a verse of a hymn that was sung at a gift service about a thousand years before Jesus came to earth.

King David had gathered together all the princes and rulers and great men of the kingdom to ask them for offerings to build a House for God. He himself had given very generously, and when he asked for gifts from the people they brought such splendid presents of gold, and silver, and brass, and iron, and precious stones that the king's heart was overflowing with thankfulness. Now you know that when David was very glad, or very sorry, or very sad, he made a song about it. And so, on this occasion, he sang a hymn of thanksgiving to God for all His good gifts. And while he was singing he felt that he couldn't give God anything that God hadn't given him already. Riches, and honour, and strength, and the power to give—all came from God, and he could only give Him back His own.

1. Now you have brought God presents to-day, presents that are going to make some of His less fortunate children happy. And those are presents that God loves very much, the presents that will give joy to somebody who is sick, or poor, or lonely, or sad. But

I want you to remember that you wouldn't have had these presents to give, that you wouldn't have had anything at all, if God hadn't first given it to you.

God is constantly giving us presents. He gives us life, He gives us health, He gives us our home. He gives us parents, and brothers, and sisters, and friends. He has given us this beautiful world to live in, and the beautiful things in it. He gives us food to eat, and sleep to refresh us. He gives us books to make us wise, and toys to make us glad. He gives us good desires, and kind thoughts, and noble ambitions. Best of all He has given His own Son to live for us and to die for us. So we cannot give God anything that He hasn't given us already.

2. But don't run away with the idea that God thinks any the less of our gifts because we give Him back His own. I wonder how many of you get a Saturday penny. Well, suppose you didn't spend that penny on sweets, and suppose you added a few more Saturday pennies to it and bought your father a present, do you think he would value the present less because he had given you the pennies first of all? You know that that is absurd. You know that he would treasure that present far above many grander ones, because he would think of the love and the self-denial that it stood for.

God is far more loving, far more understanding than any earthly father, and He loves to have our little gifts.

Some years ago a minister was getting married and the members of his congregation subscribed a big sum of money to give him a handsome present. The

day before he went away to be married a little child in the congregation came to him and shyly pressed a sticky penny into his hand with the words, "That's your present from me. It's my two Saturdays' money!" The minister thought more of that penny than of all his grand gifts. He wouldn't have parted with it for a golden sovereign. And I think God feels like that about our gifts.

Perhaps it cost you something to bring your present. You had to renounce some little pleasure to buy it, or you gave one of your own treasures. Well, God saw all that, and He loves the gift all the more for it.

Or perhaps you spent long hours making something. God saw all the love that went into your bit of work. He knew how often you pricked your finger, how often you gave up playing to toil at it. He saw the tear you bravely brushed away when everything went wrong. Yes, He saw it all, for God is never too busy to notice the things we call small.

3. God makes us free to do as we will with His gifts, and some people keep all God's gifts to themselves. Don't be one of these shabby people. You know if somebody has been very kind to you, you feel you would like to do something for them, and that is a right feeling. Well God has done much more for us than the kindest and most loving of friends. Did you ever think about what you could do for Him?

You have brought presents to-day and that is good, but there are other gifts God has given you. How are you using them?

Sometimes you hear people talking about their friends, and they say, "So-and-so has a gift for painting," or "a gift for music," or "a gift for writing." Now if you have a gift of that kind it is a great responsibility, because it is a power to make the world either better or worse, and whether you make the world better or worse depends on the way you use your gift. Well, if any one of you has a gift of that kind, remember it is a glorious opportunity, and resolve to use your gift in the service of all that is pure, and noble, and kind.

But most of us are just very plain, very ordinary, very commonplace people, and we are never likely to make a stir in the world. And yet I think we all have a gift of some kind. Perhaps it is a gift for plodding work, perhaps it is a gift for running errands, perhaps it is a gift for dusting a room or cooking a dinner, perhaps it is a gift for being kind, perhaps it is just a gift for cheering somebody with our smile. I don't know what your special gift is, but I know you have it. And I know this too—if you are using that gift to help somebody else, then you are serving God, you are giving God back His own.

And there is one gift we all have, and God wants it above all other gifts. It is the gift of our heart. Perhaps you think it isn't much worth, but God sets tremendous value on it. He prizes it above all other gifts we can bring. Will you give God back this gift? It is His by right and He gave His own Son to win it. Will you give Him back this gift, or will you keep it to yourself?

THE MAN WHOM NOBODY MISSED.

He departed without being desired.—2 Chron. xxi. 20.

I THINK this is the very saddest epitaph that was ever written about any man. If you walk through a cemetery you will see many sad things written on the tombstones. You will see inscriptions that tell you that many many people have lost relatives who were dearly loved; but I don't think you will ever find anything quite so sad as this. Jehoram "departed without being desired." Nobody missed him, nobody was sorry when he died.

Jehoram was a bad, cruel king. He began his reign by slaying all his brothers. He continued it by leading the people into wicked idolatrous ways. And when he died, he was so little thought of that the people did not even honour him by burying him in the royal tomb. They were glad to get rid of him. "He departed without being desired."

Now I wonder if you ever depart without being desired. I have known boys and girls who made such a stir in a house that older people were glad when they went out. They lost their belongings, they left their toys all over the place, they stamped with their feet, they shouted

they banged things about; and when they went out Granny heaved a big sigh which said as plainly as sighs can say, "Thank goodness those children have gone!"

And yet if they had gone away altogether, Granny would have missed them sadly. She would have thought the world a very dull place indeed without her boy or girl.

You see it isn't a little rowdiness that really makes people unwelcome. But there *are* some things that keep people from being missed. Shall I tell you the names of some of them?

1. *Selfishness* is one. The really selfish person is seldom missed, the person who is always thinking about his own wants and his own comforts, and who must have these attended to no matter how uncomfortable other people are made. If you really wish people to miss you the best way is to forget about yourself and think about them. I have met people in this world who weren't beautiful, or clever, or rich, and yet they were very much loved because they were always thinking how happy they could make other people.

2. *Evil-speaking* is another thing that keeps people from "being desired." Have you noticed that, although many people are ready to listen to the tales of a slanderer, very few want to make a friend of him? When he leaves the room nobody really misses him, and if anyone thinks about him at all, it is only to wonder what nasty thing he is saying about them on the other side of the door.

If you want to be really loved try to find out the

best in others and talk about that. The wonderful thing is that people become what you think them. William Wilberforce used to say that he had spent all his life in trying to find good in his fellow-men, and he had been disappointed but twice. Do you know what his secret was? He always looked for the best and so he found it.

3. Yet another thing prevents people from being missed, and that thing is *cruelty*. Jehoram was a cruel, bloodthirsty king, and people were glad when his reign came to an end.

Once upon a time the great French writer Victor Hugo was telling a story to his grandchildren. The story was about a bad boy who treated his dog so cruelly that the poor doggie died. When the tale was ended there was silence in the room for a minute and then one small grandson asked, "And what happened to the poor dog's wicked master?" "He remained wicked," was the answer, "and he was terribly punished for his cruelty, for nobody loved him."

Yes, that is the most terrible punishment that could befall anyone—not to be loved. And remember that cruelty begins with little things. It begins with tormenting cats, and thrashing horses and dogs, and pulling the legs off flies. It begins with bullying younger boys, with saying spiteful things about other girls, with laughing at those who are weak, or foolish, or awkward. It begins with little things, but if you let it grow it will turn you into a monster whom everyone will detest.

Away on a hillside in Eastern Kentucky there is a lonely grave and on the grave there is a roughly hewn stone. If you looked at the inscription on the stone, this is what you would read, "Jane Laler, ded Agus 1879. She wuz allus kind to evrybuddie." And in between the lines of that humble, ill-spelt inscription you could read these words—"She departed being greatly desired. A woman whom everybody missed."

THE SECRET OF STRENGTH.

So Jotham became mighty, because he prepared his ways before the Lord his God.—2 Chron. xxvii. 6 (AV).

THE Books of Kings and Chronicles are bristling with the names of kings. In fact, when we have to get them up for a Sunday school examination, we sometimes wish that there weren't so many of them and that they weren't so muddly. There seem to be just about two kinds of them—the ones that were out-and-out bad, and the ones who began well and ended badly But there is a third class, a very small one, of the ones who began well, and went on well, and ended well, and Jotham is one of them.

We don't know very much about him—his history is summed up in a few verses—but what we do know makes us wish to know more. We are told that he was the son of King Uzziah, that he was twenty-five years old when he began to reign, and that he reigned sixteen years over Judah. We are told also that he was a great builder and that he fought successfully against the Ammonites. And then last of all we are let into the secret of his success—"Jotham became mighty, because he prepared his ways before the Lord."

Now of course you all know that the prepared person

is the strong person. Did you ever wonder why it is that bulbous plants like the snowdrop and the crocus and the daffodil flower so early, and how it is that they are able to grow flowers before they grow leaves? Most plants have to grow leaves before they grow flowers because it is through the leaves that they take in the food that makes them able to produce flowers. But how are the bulbous plants able to grow flowers first? It is because they are prepared. Months and months ago, away back in the summertime, they took in nourishment through their leaves and stored it away in their bulbs under the ground, and so when the first spring days came they were ready to burst into flower.

Now you know that most flowers are dependent on the bees and the butterflies to carry the pollen dust from one blossom to another, and these bulbous plants stand the best chance of being visited by the bees because they are first awake. They are already blossoming while many of the other little flowers are just beginning to stir under the ground.

And it is the same with us as it is with the flowers. The boys and girls who are prepared have the best chance. The boy who has prepared for his examination has a big pull over the one who has scarcely opened a book. The boy who has practised for the school sports is more likely to win than the one who has taken things easy and not bothered to get ready. You will do your best work and play your best play if you are prepared.

Now I think most boys and girls are quite ready to

take some trouble about those things. If they are going in for an examination they have a good grind at their lessons. If they are going to run in a race, or play in a cricket or hockey match, they practise for weeks beforehand. But I want to ask you a question. Are you prepared for life? You have taken a lot of trouble about these smaller things. Are you taking any trouble about the biggest thing of all? You are setting out in life and it will not be just a joke or a picnic. It will be a pretty big battle sometimes. How are you equipped for it? The only sure preparation is to be prepared before God, to take God as your Friend and Guide as Jotham did, to give Him control of your heart and of your life.

People have tried setting out in life without God. It can be done; but do you know what has happened? Some of them have made shipwreck; some have become hard and embittered; and the best have never been at their best, because you can never be at your best without God.

"Jotham became mighty, because he prepared his ways before the Lord his God." We are told of two ways in which Jotham became mighty. First he was a great builder, and second he was a great conqueror.

Jotham was a great builder. He built a gate for the Temple and a wall on the Temple hill. He built cities in the mountains, and castles and towers in the forests. And if we prepare our ways before the Lord we shall be great builders too. We shall build up a beautiful

strong character and a strong wall round it to keep out the enemy.

Jotham was a great conqueror. He overcame the foes of Judah. And we, too, if we prepare our ways before the Lord shall be great conquerors. We shall conquer the evil that is in ourselves, and we shall help to conquer the evil that is in the world

O.H.M.S.

The posts went with the letters.—2 Chron. xxx. 6.

AND so our good old friend the post is to be found in the Bible! Yes, but I'm afraid you might not recognize him if you met him, for the posts mentioned here didn't wear a navy-blue uniform with red pipings, as our posts do, and they didn't carry letters from house to house. They were couriers or runners chosen from the king's body-guard, and they were employed to carry the king's messages all over the land.

I wonder how many of you would like to be postmen? How many would like to be king's messengers carrying the king's letters? You can all be that if you wish, and to a much greater King than King George, to a much greater than King Hezekiah, who sent out those posts in our text. Sometimes it is difficult for a boy or a girl to get into King George's postal service, because the vacancies are few, and only a certain number of applicants are chosen. But this King has always plenty of room in His service, and anyone can get in who likes to apply.

Now there are three things I want to say about postmen in the service of the Heavenly King.

1. They must be *prompt*—ready to obey the King's

commands at a moment's notice and to do whatever He asks them to do.

When Professor Henry Drummond was a very small boy at Stirling High School the boys decorated and illuminated the school in honour of the marriage of the late King Edward who was then Prince of Wales. They cut out Prince of Wales feathers and suitable mottoes in coloured paper—blue, and pink, and red, and yellow—and they stuck them on the windows. When night came on they put lighted candles in the windows so that when people passed outside they saw Prince of Wales feathers shining in every window.

Henry was too small to help, but he was eagerly watching the cutting out and pasting when a big boy came to him and asked him to run down town and buy twopence worth of pink paper. Now Drummond thought it was much more fun watching the others than going on a dull errand, so he refused. "Why won't you go?" asked the big boy. "Because I don't want to." "But do you know it is 'O.H.M.S.'?" asked the other. "You don't really mean it!" said Henry, and off he went like a shot. And as he ran down the street he felt, as he afterwards said, about "ten feet high."

You see it makes all the difference in the world when you are "O.H.M.S." When the King gives a command you obey at once without questioning. And the errands that are bothersome and the duties that are disagreeable seem quite different. If they are

difficult or disagreeable it is all the more honour to us that the King has asked us to do them.

In ancient Persia the posts were mounted on swift steeds. It was said of these messengers that nothing mortal travelled so fast and that they outstripped the flight of birds. And the messengers of the Great King must be like these ancient Persians—swift to do the King's bidding, ready to go whenever and wherever the King calls them.

2. The King's postmen must be *faithful.* King Hezekiah's postmen carried his messages written on parchment, but the Great King writes His message on boys, and girls, and men, and women. His postmen carry the message on themselves. They are the letters as well as the postmen, and by their life and conduct they show the mind and heart of the King.

Now there are a great many people going about the world who call themselves the King's messengers, and when other people see them they say, "Well, if the King is at all like them we don't want to be His followers!" They are unfaithful postmen and bring disgrace on the King's name.

In the life of Bishop Bompas, whose work lay in the district of the Mackenzie River away in the cold North-West of Canada, there is a funny story of how some letters got mixed up.

The mails arrived only twice a year and their arrival was always a great event in the life of the

fort. In the wintertime they were brought from a long distance by Indians with dog-sledges.

On one occasion the Indian in charge broke through the ice, and man, dogs, and letters all got a thorough soaking. The Indian made for the shore and lit a fire to dry his clothes. Then he looked ruefully at the wet letters. What was to be done with them? Suddenly a brilliant idea occurred to him. He took them out of their envelopes and stacked them up round the fire to dry. When they were all nicely toasted he proceeded to replace them. Then he discovered to his dismay that he did not know which letter belonged to which envelope. As he was unable to read he could get no clue, so he just popped any letter into any envelope and proceeded on his way.

By and by he arrived at the fort and delivered up the mail; and *then* the fun began. The Bishop opened sedate-looking envelopes addressed to himself and found they contained private documents or love-letters intended for the officers at the fort. And the officers on opening some of their letters discovered solemn epistles intended for the Bishop. At last the Indian confessed what had happened, matters were cleared up, and everybody had a good laugh.

Now the unfaithful messengers are like letters that have been put into the wrong envelope. When the people to whom they are sent look inside they say, "Why, this isn't the writing of the King at all. It is the writing of selfishness, or pride, or greed. This boy is wearing the King's uniform, the envelope and

the address seem all right, but inside he is a sad disappointment and not at all what we expected."

Don't get into the wrong envelope, boys and girls. Don't pretend to belong to the King and be really serving yourself. Remember that when you wear the King's uniform you must carry His messages faithfully.

3. Lastly, if we want to be swift messengers, if we want to be faithful messengers, we must *keep in touch with the King.* We cannot carry His messages unless we are in communication with Him. But He has made a path for us all whereby we may reach Him in a moment, and that path is called the Way of Prayer. If we go to Him frequently by that path we need never fear to prove unfaithful, for He will show us His mind and heart, He will fill us with His spirit, He will guide us in all our ways.

TWO SAINTS OF GOD.

Josiah was eight years old when he began to reign. . . . In the eighth year of his reign, while he was yet young, he began to seek after the God of David his father.—2 Chron. xxxiv. 1, 3.

To-day I want to tell you about two kings. One of them lived about six hundred years before Christ, the other about twelve hundred years after. One of them ruled a little Eastern kingdom, the other a great European country. But although they were separated by eighteen hundred years, although one was a Hebrew and the other a Frenchman, they had many points in common.

Both had good wise mothers. Both began to reign when they were children. Both gave themselves early to God's service. Both lived upright and true lives. Both ruled wisely and well.

Now of course you want to know who these kings were. So I shall tell you.

The first one was called Josiah. You may read all about him in the twenty-second and twenty-third chapters of 2 Kings and the thirty-fourth and thirty-fifth of 2 Chronicles. He was king of Judah for thirty-one years and he began to reign when he was only eight years of age. Just think of being a king at

eight years! Mustn't it have been a dreadful responsibility?

Now Josiah had a bad father. He forsook the God of Israel and worshipped the idols of the heathen. He was so bad that at last his own servants rose up and slew him. But if the little king had a bad father he had one tremendous advantage—he had a good mother. How do we know that? Well, there are two reasons.

One is that she was called Jedidah. And Jedidah just means "beloved of the Lord." It was the name that the prophet Nathan gave to Solomon when he was a tiny baby. Now in those days a name meant much more than it does to-day. It was not given without reason. And so when we learn that Josiah's mother was called "the beloved of the Lord" we may be pretty sure that she was a very good woman indeed.

And the other reason is that Jedidah had such a good son. Josiah might have been a bad boy. His father was a bad man, and the chances were pretty equal that he should turn out badly too. But he didn't: he did the very opposite; and I believe it was largely owing to the love, and the care, and the training, and the influence of his mother. For, boys and girls, more than any other person in the world, your mother has the making or the marring of you, and if you have a good mother, then go down on your knees and thank God with all your heart for her.

But we must return to Josiah. Josiah was eight years old when he began to reign, and the next thing

we are told about him is that in the eighth year of his reign, while he was still young, when he was about fifteen or sixteen, he began to seek after the God of David. The seed his mother had been sowing quietly all these years had begun to bear fruit, and of his own accord he sought after God.

But Josiah did not stop short at seeking after God. He felt that God had something for him to do. His grandfather had built altars to heathen gods and made carved images, and his father and all the people had worshipped them and forsaken the true God. Josiah set himself to destroy everything that belonged to this heathen worship. And that was a very brave and daring thing to do. He broke down the altars, crushed the images to powder, and overthrew the temples. But he did more than destroy, he built up too. The Temple of God had fallen into a sad state of neglect and he gave orders that it should be repaired.

Now whilst the workmen were busy with their repairs a wonderful discovery was made. In some corner or cupboard where it had long lain, covered with dust and cobwebs, Hilkiah, the high priest, found a book containing the laws of God. It was the book that we know as Deuteronomy. Hilkiah gave it to Shaphan the scribe, and Shaphan carried it to the king.

And when the king read the book he was exceedingly sad. For he saw how it was foretold in that book that if the Israelites forsook the true God for the gods of the heathen and followed after wrong

paths, then their enemies would come and carry them away captive into a strange land. And he was ashamed and sorry too that the nation had done so many wrong things and forgotten God.

So he gathered the people together into the house of God and he read aloud to them from the book that had been found. Then he took a solemn vow that he would keep the commandments of God with all his heart and with all his soul. And he made the people promise that they would keep them too.

Josiah died in battle fighting against the king of Egypt and all Judah made a great mourning for him. For he was the best king that ever reigned in Judah and his people loved him dearly.

The other king I want to tell you about is Louis IX. of France.

Louis was born at Poissy on St. Mark's Day in the year 1214—just a hundred years before the battle of Bannockburn. He was baptized in the church at Poissy and there the cross was traced on his brow. In after years he spoke of that church as the place where he had received his greatest honour. When he said that, his friends thought he must be making a mistake, and that he meant the great cathedral at Rheims where the crown was placed on his head. But Louis considered that his greatest honour was, not the crown, but the cross that was laid on his brow at Poissy.

The little prince had a bright sunny nature and he was beloved by everyone, friends and servants alike.

From his childhood he was pitiful and tender to the poor and the sick, and he was always ready to do a kindness to anyone.

Louis was only twelve years of age when his father died, and as his elder brother had died previously he was now king of France. Until he was twenty-one his mother acted as regent and she ruled wisely and well. For Queen Blanche was a splendid woman. A writer of her day said that she had the courage of a man in the heart of a woman.

But besides governing well the queen brought up her son wisely. She never forgot that he was called to rule over a great kingdom and it was her aim that he should become worthy of his kingship. He was trained in all the arts and the learning that go towards the making of a good king. No spoiling was allowed in the royal palace and the rod was not spared. But above all the queen taught her son to believe in God and to love and fear Him in his youth. In after years King Louis remembered how his mother had once said that she would rather see him dead than guilty of a single mortal sin.

And Louis proved worthy of the training. He grew up brave and chivalrous, wise and good. He was a lover of peace and justice, a defender of the oppressed, a succourer of all that were poor and in distress.

It would take long to tell of all Louis' kind and good deeds. He built hospitals for the sick in several towns, and at Paris he founded an asylum for the blind which still exists. Every day one hundred and

twenty poor people were fed in the palace and often the king served them with his own hands. He gave away much money to the needy. When his counsellors objected he replied that he would rather spend his surplus money in that way than in luxury and vainglory. In those days leprosy was a common disease in France. It had been brought back by the Crusaders from the Holy Land. Now the lepers were kept apart in isolated houses, but Louis was not afraid to approach them, and with his own hands he fed them and attended to them.

If you want to learn of Louis' valour you must read of the brave deeds he did in Egypt during the Seventh Crusade. The Crusade was a failure, but Louis distinguished himself by his courage and his consideration for others.

Louis died in Tunis in 1270 on his way to the Eighth Crusade. When he was dying he sent for his eldest son and gave him wise counsels about the governing of the people. He told him always to be tender and compassionate to the poor, not to tax the people unduly, to deal justly and rightly with rich and poor alike, and to see that the magistrates and judges governed well. Above all, he counselled him to make himself beloved of his people.

So died Louis the Good, afterwards called Saint Louis. And all the country mourned him, for all loved him from the richest noble to the humblest serf.

Why have I told you these stories? It is because I

want you to know how good and noble a man may become, to realize that it is never too early to begin to serve God. King Josiah began at sixteen, and I think King Louis began at twelve, when he received his knighthood on the day before he was crowned. All alone and all night he watched his armour in the Cathedral at Rheims and he lifted his heart in prayer that God would accept his service and make him a worthy knight.

And, boys and girls, you can never begin better than by serving God in your youth. Many of the great saints of the world began to serve Him early. Do you know that you have a glorious privilege—the privilege of giving your fresh young lives, all unspoiled, to God? Grown-up people can't do that. Many of them can give only a few poor tattered remnants, and God is willing to accept even that. But you have the joy and privilege of giving all, and that gift is a sacrifice very precious in the sight of the King of kings.

YESTERDAY, TO-DAY, TO-MORROW.

The matter of the day in his day.—Ezra iii. 4 (AVm).

THE text is taken from an account of the keeping of the Feast of Tabernacles after the Jews had returned from Babylon.

The Feast of Tabernacles, which was held in the month of October, was one of the great Jewish festivals. It was their harvest thanksgiving, and celebrated the ingathering of the year's corn and wine and oil. It was a time of great joy, and to express their joy the Jews gave presents to each other, much as we do at Christmas.

The feast lasted for eight days and on each day sacrifices were offered up—sacrifices of rams and lambs and bullocks. Now there was a curious thing about these sacrifices. They varied each day. On the first day thirteen bullocks were offered, on the second twelve, on the third eleven, and so on. Each day a bullock fewer was offered until on the seventh day seven were sacrificed. On the eighth there was a change. One bullock only was offered up, along with one ram, seven lambs and a goat.

Now this little bit of a verse which we have chosen

to-day refers to these sacrifices. Each day differed as you have seen, and these old priests kept to the laws and rules that had been laid down. They didn't offer up Monday's sacrifice on Tuesday, or Wednesday's on Thursday. They offered their burnt offerings as the duty of each day required, or, as the margin puts it, "the matter of the day in his day."

I think it would be a good thing if we chose these words as one of our mottoes.

The Duke of Wellington was once asked by someone how he was able to write his remarkable dispatches in the midst of all the pressure of war. Do you know what he replied?—"My rule has always been to do the business of the day in the day." If we would attend to the matter of each day in its day, some of us would be much happier and more comfortable people. If we could just stick to the work of each day in its day and put our whole mind into that, we should avoid a great deal of worry and the loss of much energy.

Now there are three things which it is good to remember.

1. *Don't bother about yesterday to-day.*—Nobody wants you to, nobody asks you to. If you have made mistakes, well, it just can't be helped. I daresay you are sorry about it. But the best way to be sorry is to try with all your might to do better to-day.

2. *Don't bother about to-morrow to-day.*—If you look after to-day, to-morrow will look after itself. So don't keep worrying about all the dreadful things that are

going to happen—about the tooth that is going to be pulled, and the examination that is going to be held. And don't keep dreaming so much about the wonderful things you are going to do *some day* that you let slip the golden opportunities of to-day. The boys and girls who do nothing but dream about what they will do *some day* often grow up into the men and women who do nothing but regret what they might do if they had their chances over again.

He used to dream of things he'd do
When grown to be a man,
Beguiling boyhood's years away
With many an idle plan.

And now, when grown to be a man,
He knows no greater joy
Than dreaming of the things he'd do
If he were still a boy.[1]

3. *Never put off till to-morrow what you can do to-day.*—There are lots of people who are never ready to-morrow because they wasted time and opportunity to-day. There are plenty of people who lose their chances to-morrow because they didn't do their duty to-day.

If you ever visit the north-east of Scotland you must go to see the fine old Castle of Dunnottar, which stands on a cliff two miles south of Stonehaven, the county town of Kincardineshire. Dunnottar Castle formerly belonged to the Keiths who were Earls-Marischal of

[1] Thomas Nunan, in *A Garland of Verse*, 81.

Scotland and had charge of the Scottish regalia. There are many thrilling stories connected with the history of that old keep, but it is not of those I want to tell you to-day.

About a mile inland from the castle lies the old churchyard of Dunnottar where the Earls-Marischal were formerly buried. In the days of Sir Walter Scott the family vault in the burial ground was fast falling into decay. At that time the castle and its domains belonged to one Keith of Ravelstone, who was a relative of Scott.

Now Mr. Keith conceived that it was his duty to repair the vault and he accordingly took estimates for that purpose. It was reported that £10 would be required to put the building in order. Mr. Keith offered £5 and his offer was refused. Two years later he regretted his decision and offered the full sum. But meantime wind and rain had been doing their work and the answer came back that £20 would now scarcely suffice. The result was that, as Sir Walter Scott says, Mr. Keith "hummed and ha'd" for three more years and then offered £20. The breaches had widened and the reply was that now £50 would be required. One other year Mr. Keith delayed, and then sent a cheque for £50. It was returned by post immediately with the information that the Earl-Marischal's aisle had fallen the preceding week!

Boys and girls, that story speaks for itself, but remember that there are golden opportunities passing by you every day—opportunities not only of growing

wiser and better, but of doing little kindnesses to those around you.

One other story I want to tell you. Once an Indian native told a missionary that he believed in Jesus and meant to give Him his love *some day*. A native helper who was standing by said to him, "If you and I were walking through a jungle and came face to face with a tiger, and I put myself in front of you and cried, 'Run, brother, for your life,' would you love me?" "Yes, surely." "When? some day?" The native saw the point. He said, "I will give myself to Him now and you shall baptize me to-morrow."

That is all, boys and girls. I'm not going to preach a sermon, but I want you to preach it to yourselves.

ABSOLUTELY IT.

Let it be done exactly.—Ezra vii. 23.

THE other day I watched a girl sewing. Round her neck she had hung an inch-tape, and every now and then she stopped sewing, took her inch-tape, and measured a fold in her cloth. Then she ran her needle and thread along the fold. She was making tucks, you see, and to make tucks that will look nice when you wear them you have to be most particular. If you haven't got exactly the same distance between each tuck, or if you haven't got exactly the same depth of tuck, the consequences will be rather peculiar. The tucks will look like the waves of the sea. One will be dipping down to meet another, and a third will be rising up to touch its neighbour. The set of tucks and the whole garment will be spoiled if the measurements are not exact.

Inch-tapes are only for girls, the boys will say. But, boys, what about a foot-rule? That's just a masculine inch-tape. You use it, and you know that it would be almost impossible for you to do any carpentry, or handy jobs that require measurement, without the aid of a foot-rule. If you haven't one of your own you know how you envy the workman who

comes to the house and whips out a foot-rule from that capacious back-pocket of his. It positively makes your fingers itch to see him open out that rule and snap it together again in a professional style.

Inch-tapes and foot-rules, plumb-lines and spirit-levels—they are all invaluable, for they help us to turn out correct and exact work. Guess-work may be clever, but it is risky and dishonest.

Now the world may be divided into those who use inch-tapes and foot-rules, and those who don't. The first will have only what is "absolutely it" and the second are content with a "near enough." You hear some people say such and such is "near enough" or "What's half an inch here or there?" or "A penny more or less doesn't matter." But that's where they are wrong. "Near enough" is not near enough. It might as well be miles away.

There are two reasons that such people usually give why "near enough" will do, and I want to show you that both are false.

1. The first reason they give is that "near enough" *is easier* than "absolutely it." It may seem easier at the moment not to measure your tuck, but it saves you unpicking it and sewing it over again. It may seem easier not to add up your column of pence twice, but it will be less easy to recount the whole sum—pounds, shillings, *and* pence. It may be easier to go on building a wall and adding brick to brick without constantly stopping to use your plumb-line to see that

it is straight up and down, but it is much more troublesome to have to pull down the wall and rebuild it because it is leaning over by the time you reach the top. Exactness is a saving, not a waste, of time, and the "absolutely its" are always first in the end.

2. The second reason which the "near enoughs" give is that *it really doesn't matter.* Doesn't it? Carelessness always matters. It is dangerous for yourself, and it is dangerous for other people.

A workman who was making a saddle put in a piece of inferior work, but he thought it would pass and did not trouble to make it right. That saddle was ridden in the Zulu war by the Prince Imperial. During a battle the prince was surrounded by the wild tribesmen and had to fight for dear life. He had a good horse under him, his friends were coming to his rescue, and it was merely a case of holding on till they arrived, but suddenly his saddle gave way and he was thrown to the ground. In a moment the Zulus were upon him and he was wounded to death. The heir to the throne of France lost his life because a careless saddler thought "near enough" would do in making a saddle.

Here is another story. Some years ago the United States of America were passing a bill about the articles that should be admitted into the country free of duty. Amongst the goods named were fruit-plants, with a hyphen between "fruit" and "plants." That meant that any growing fruit-plants for transplanting might come in without paying duty. The clerk who was

copying the bill missed out the hyphen and stuck in a comma instead, making the words read "fruit, plants," etc. What do you think happened? For a whole year, until Congress could remedy the blunder, all oranges, lemons, bananas, grapes, and other foreign fruits came in duty free, and the American Government lost about half a million pounds sterling. That was a pretty costly comma, wasn't it?

Boys and girls, don't believe the "near enoughs." They are wrong every time. Make up your mind to-day that you will be an "absolutely it"—for your own sake, because it is the only honest way; for other people's sake, because it is the only safe way; most of all for Christ's sake, because it is His way.

THE COLOUR OF VIRTUE.

I am ashamed and blush.—Ezra ix. 6.
Neither could they blush.—Jer. vi. 15.

DID you ever hear the story of how the Virginian creeper got its blush? The story is only a legend, but it is very beautiful and worth repeating. It tells that when the plants and flowers were first created they were all green; but God sent down to earth one of His angels, and told him to give each flower a colour of its own. So the angel flew busily over the earth, and each flower he touched turned some lovely hue. He gave the crocus its gold, and the violet its purple, and the rose its red, and the poppy its scarlet, the forget-me-not its blue, and the snowdrop its white. He was a very busy angel, I assure you, as he flew over hill and dale and wood and field, painting all the flowers he saw.

But alas! he missed a very small creeper lying hidden in the shadow of a great wall. It felt dreadfully sad to think that the angel had passed it over, and for a little while it lay on the ground and wept. But after a time it cheered up and said to itself, "Well, though I may not be beautiful I can always be useful. I'll set to work and cover this great bare wall." So it climbed and spread, and climbed and spread, till the wall had a magnificent covering of green.

In autumn the angel returned to earth to see how his flowers were looking, and, as he flew, his eye lit upon this wonderful green thing spreading all over the wall. Though it had no colour but green it looked so glad and busy that the angel stopped to admire it and praise it for all it had so bravely done. And when the angel spoke, the Virginian creeper felt so pleased to think that what it had done was good in the angel's sight that it blushed a glorious crimson. And when autumn comes and flowers decay, the Virginian creeper still blushes crimson, remembering how the angel praised it long ago.

That is a pretty legend, isn't it? "Yes," I hear some of you sigh, "but I'd rather the Virginian creeper blushed than *me*. It's so horribly awkward. I just can't keep from blushing, and the more I want not to do it the more I do it. I'm so ashamed of myself sometimes."

Boys and girls, you should never be ashamed of blushing. What you should be ashamed of is not being able to blush. A blush is a really good thing, and it is only right that your rosy cheeks should sometimes grow a few shades rosier. Why! we blush for pleasure, we blush because of praise, we blush with honest indignation, and I *hope* we blush for shame or guilt.

Of course I know there's a sort of blush that really is most annoying—the unnecessary blush. It is the blush that you feel when you walk into a room or a public building, and you are certain that every eye is

upon you. It is the blush that comes when you and a few others are accused of some fault, and you, who are not guilty, and know nothing about it, flush a brilliant scarlet. Well that blush comes from shyness or self-consciousness; and the cure for it is just to forget yourself. A hundred chances to one nobody is thinking of you or taking special notice of you. At such times try hard to think of some other thing or some other person, and you will be astonished how that will help to keep the blush away.

So much for the unnecessary blush! But there are times when a blush is necessary, and if we don't blush then we are in a sad case indeed.

You will notice we have two texts to-day, and the first says, "I am ashamed and blush." That was the prophet Ezra speaking to God. Why was he blushing? He was blushing because he loved the people of Israel so much that he was ashamed of their faults. The second text is from the prophet Jeremiah. He also loved the people of Israel, but what grieved him was that they were so hardened in their sins that they couldn't even blush for them.

Boys and girls, it is a dangerous thing if we can't blush. It means that we are no longer ashamed, that we no longer feel guilty when we do wrong, that we have grown absolutely brazen.

"Courage, my boy!" said Diogenes of old, when he saw a youth flushing. "That is the colour of virtue." Diogenes was a Greek philosopher, and he must have known the explanation which the Greeks gave of

shame. The Greeks said that Jupiter was so sorry for the miseries that men brought on themselves by their sins that he sent Mercury to implant in their hearts justice and shame, that these two virtues might save the world from ruin.

We are wiser than the wise old Greeks, for we know that it was God who implanted in man's heart the senses both of shame and of justice; but the Greeks were quite right in their idea that justice and shame help men to be good. If we are ashamed to do wrong deeds, if we are ashamed to listen to evil words and horrid stories, if we are ashamed of meanness, or covetousness, or untruthfulness, if we can blush for all these things, and blush also the hot blush of anger at wrong done to others, then there is some hope for us. People will think none the less of us for such blushes; and God, who sees the faintest tinge of red, will rejoice that His child can fly the flag of virtue.

HOW THEY BUILT THE WALLS.

We made our prayer unto our God, and set a watch against them day and night.—Neh. iv. 9.

Every one with one of his hands wrought in the work, and with the other held his weapon.—Neh. iv. 17.

TO-DAY I want to carry you all away with me back across the centuries till we reach a time more than four hundred years before Jesus came into the world. And I want to take you far across land and sea till we stand outside old Jerusalem. Will you all please put on a magic wishing-cap and think yourselves there?

We are going to take a night ride round the city with a man called Nehemiah, and we are going to see all that he sees. The moon is shining brightly and everything shows up almost as well as in the daylight. It shines down on the beautiful Temple of God within the city, but it shines, too, on ruined walls and gates destroyed by fire. We try to enter by one gate but there is no room for our mules to pass. The gateway is choked with stones and rubbish. So we ride on, and we begin to feel very sad as we look at all this ruin and desolation. We ask what it means, and this is the story we are told.

About a hundred and fifty years ago Nebuchadrezzar, king of Babylon, laid siege to this beautiful city of Jerusalem. He broke down the walls, destroyed the

Temple, and carried away many of the Jews captive into Babylon. But after many years the king of Persia defeated and conquered the king of Babylon, and this new king allowed the Jews to return to their own country and rebuild the Temple of their God.

But although the Temple has been rebuilt the walls still lie in ruins, and no city in these days is safe unless it is surrounded by a high strong wall.

So Nehemiah has come to Jerusalem to help the Jews to raise their wall again, and as he rides round the city he is planning how he will set them all to work to build it.

Now we are going to let a few weeks pass and we are going back to look at the city. The wall has been built to half its height and everywhere men are busy carrying burdens or getting the stones fixed in their places. Suddenly a report comes in that the enemies of the Jews are plotting to destroy the wall. These men do not want a fortified Jerusalem and they have tried to do all they can to stop the work.

But Nehemiah is ready for them. He does three things to thwart their plans. First he prays to God. But although he knows that God will help him he does not neglect to do his part. So next he sets a watch day and night. And lastly he arms every man. Those who are bearing burdens on their heads or backs and so have one hand free carry a javelin; and the masons who require both hands for their work have a sword fastened to their side. In the meantime the main work goes on from day to day. Stone rises on stone until at last the wall is finished and Jerusalem is safe.

I wonder if you can guess why I have chosen this old-time story to-day. It is because we have all within us—you and I and everyone else—a beautiful temple of God. That temple is the temple of the soul and we must build a high, strong protecting wall round it—the wall of character. We have to build that wall stone by stone, and inch by inch. Sometimes we put in a good habit, sometimes an unselfish act. Sometimes we add a kind word and sometimes a loving look. But whatever they are, if they are good stones, they all help to build a beautiful strong wall to protect God's temple.

Now we all have an Enemy who wants to knock down our wall and spoil the temple of our soul, and like Nehemiah we must defend ourselves against him in three ways.

First *we must pray to God.* He alone is stronger than the Enemy and it is only with God's help that we can gain the victory over him, so we are never really safe unless we keep near to God in prayer.

But besides praying to God we must do our part. We must not ask God to help us and take no trouble to keep the Enemy away. So next *we must set a watch day and night.* The Enemy is very cunning and you may be sure he will try to get into our fortress at the side where we are not watching.

Do you remember the story in Æsop's Fables about the deer with the blind eye? This deer fed on the grass between a wood and the sea, and she always kept her blind eye to the sea and her good eye towards the wood where the hunters and the dogs were. But one

day a hunter noticed this; so he got a little boat and put out a bit from the shore and shot the deer from the side where she could not see. And as the deer lay dying she lamented that she had been quite safe from the side where she looked for danger, and that the danger had come from the side where she was not expecting it.

Our Enemy is just like that. He is much too cunning to try to pierce our walls at the point where we are watching. He goes round till he finds the place where we think we are quite secure. So the only safe way is to watch at all sides and at all times.

But if, in spite of all our precautions, the Enemy does get a footing inside our fortress we must have our weapons ready to drive him out again. So in the third place *we must wear our armour constantly.* And the best weapons are a strong determination and a firm faith in God.

Just one word more. Remember that the Jews who raised the walls went on building all the time. They prayed, and they watched, and they had their weapons ready, but above all they *built.* Their enemies would have been quite content if they had stopped the work, and our Enemy desires above all things that we should stop our work of character-building. So we must keep at it, however hard and monotonous it seems at times, however much we blunder, however weary we feel. And remember that if we are in earnest, God will put right all our mistakes, and keep our temples safe for His Holy City, the New Jerusalem above.

A GOOD DAY.

A day of gladness and feasting, and a good day, and of sending portions one to another, . . . and gifts to the poor.—Est. ix. 19, 22.

WHAT do you call a good day? I wonder. Do you ever say to yourself as you snuggle under the blankets at night, "Well this has been a good day anyway." I think I could guess what has made your day a good day. More than likely it has been a day when delightful things have happened to you. Perhaps you have got a present of something you have been longing for; perhaps you have been treated to a circus or a menagerie; perhaps you have made a fine score at cricket; perhaps you have won a prize that you have worked hard to get; perhaps—but there's no need to add more, there are hundreds of jolly things in the world that may have made it a good day for you.

Why was it a good day for the people in our text? I can tell you. It was a good day because God had delivered them out of terrible danger, and made them victorious over their enemies. If things had gone as they had been planned not one of these people would have been alive on that good day. They would all have been dead on the day before; for that was the danger they had escaped—the danger of losing their lives.

They were Jews—these people—but not Jews living in their own land; they were living in the land of Persia. The king of that land had listened to evil tales which were not true, and had been persuaded by a man called Haman, who hated the Jews, that they were a wicked troublesome lot and that the sooner the king got rid of them all the better. The king, unfortunately, was rather a foolish man who gave orders first and thought afterwards, so he immediately ordered that all the Jews should be put to death on a certain day. It was a large order; and a terrible one too.

But there was one who determined that if she could help it that order should not be carried out. She was a Jewess, and her name was Esther, and she was also the king's wife. He was very fond of her, but he was such a great king that even she dared not approach him until he sent for her. If she went to him without being sent for she risked her life. But Esther thought only of her people and that made her brave, so she went to the king and she showed him how wicked and false Haman's stories had been, and the king repented of the order he had given, and was so angry with Haman that he condemned him to death.

But the difficulty in Persia was that once a law had been made it could never be unmade. If the king had once said, "Kill the Jews," he couldn't say, "Do not kill the Jews." However the king hit upon a plan. He issued an order that all the Jews should be allowed to defend themselves when attacked; and when the dreaded day arrived the Jews were ready; and instead

of being slain, they slew their enemies. Then the day after they rested and feasted and were glad. They made that day a good day, a day of rejoicing, and of sending presents to one another, and of giving presents to the poor. That is how it was a good day for the Jews.

And it is still a good day for the Jews in every land, for in memory of that great deliverance the Jews keep what they call the feast of *Purim*. It is a sort of Jewish Christmas day, for alas! the Jews do not keep Christmas day as we do.

Now I think we might copy these old Jews in their idea of a good day. You see God first made it a good day for them, and then they made it a good day for others. When God gives us a good day, why should we not pass on some of the goodness to others? Let us give away some of the joy that comes our way. Let us share our happiness. Instead of making us less happy it will make us even happier.

Boys and girls, it is like this. God gives us everything, and we can't show our gratitude to Him in the same way as we can show it to other people. We can't give God something in return. Of course we can give Him our love, and He wants that most of all, but I am speaking rather of some real thing, some token, and we can't give that to God. No, but we can give it to somebody else who needs it, and that is what God wishes us to do. Giving it to that somebody, we are really giving it to Him. There are plenty of "somebodies" who have got neither happy homes, nor jolly

presents, nor nice food, nor warm clothing. God loves us to remember these "somebodies" when the good day comes our way.

I think God would be very pleased if we were all like the little girl I read of the other day. She and her brothers and sisters were promised a monthly allowance of pocket-money. She was a very tiny tot, so her allowance was to be only a halfpenny a month. But a halfpenny seemed a huge sum to the little maid, and she was so overjoyed that she got it changed at once for two farthings. Then she ran through to her father's study and said, "Daddy, I'm very rich now, and I'm going to allow you a farthing a month; and here is your December farthing!"

If God gives us the halfpennies, let us try to give away the farthings. If He gives us a good and happy day, let us try to make it a good and happy day for others. If we do that we shall find that it is not only a good but, what is better, a perfect day.

A SPIDER'S WEB.

Whose trust is a spider's web.—Job viii. 14.

YOU have all seen a spider's web, and some of you may have stopped for a minute to admire the arrangement of it. You noticed the long strong lines which run from the centre to the circumference, and the short lines which are woven across them at equal distances, making a perfect pattern. From the centre of the web runs a trap line up to the hiding-place of the spider which is in some little crevice or under a leaf. The slightest touch of the web sends a quiver along the threads and up this line, and the spider comes rushing down to see what has happened.

The web is made so as to take the smallest amount of time and silk. It is so fine that it can scarcely be seen, yet strong enough to stand the struggles of the insect caught in it. It is close enough to catch tiny flies, yet open enough to let the wind blow through it, and so it avoids the strain that would break down anything more solid. It blows with the breeze. You have sometimes seen in damp weather the bushes covered with gossamer threads which seem to appear suddenly from nowhere. These are woven by spiders too.

Some kinds of spiders when they are young and light are bold airmen. The little spider spins a long thread, lets the wind catch it, and immediately rises in the air to a great height, and sails away in his balloon. It is not a dirigible, however; he can't steer it, and he must just go with the wind. In this way spiders travel long distances, and even cross wide arms of the sea.

There have been fables and superstitions about spiders. You will still hear many people say that a spider is "lucky" and that to kill it is "unlucky," but good housekeepers do not pay much attention to that when they find one weaving its web in their house.

The Greeks had a story about the spider. They said there was once a girl called Arachne. She lived with her father, who was famous for the purple dye which he made. Arachne was wonderfully clever at spinning and weaving. Her parents were proud of her, and her fame spread through the whole of Greece. Great people came to see her at her work, and paid high prices for her tapestry. As a result, I am sorry to say, her head was turned, and she became very vain and boasted that no one could make tapestry like her—not even the goddess Athene.

Now the goddess Athene was the patroness of all that kind of work, and when she heard this she was much annoyed and came, disguised as an old woman, to Arachne's house. She found her busy at her work, and heard her boast that not even Athene could do better. The disguised goddess warned Arachne not to

compare herself to Athene, but the girl would not listen. She merely boasted all the more and challenged Athene to come and try a contest with her. Then Athene took her own form, and they both set to work. The goddess wove pictures showing the fate of those mortals who had dared to oppose themselves to gods, and Arachne wove pictures showing the foolish things the gods had done (for the gods of Greece were just like men—very powerful but no better).

When they had finished their work, even Athene had to admit that Arachne had won. Her work was faultless. Then the goddess in a fit of anger tore it in pieces, and struck the girl on the head with the shuttle. When Arachne saw that she had brought Athene's anger upon her, and that her web was destroyed, she tried to hang herself, but Athene prevented her, and said henceforth she and all her race should hang by a rope and spin for ever. And at once Arachne changed into a spider, and there she and her race hang by threads and spin and spin to this day. And that, said the old Greeks, was the punishment for pride and presumption.

Let me tell you another spider story. In the early days of Christianity, there was a very good man called Felix of Nola. He was persecuted for his religion, and had to flee for his life. He went to a lonely uninhabited place, full of rocks. There were caves in the rocks, and Nola hid himself in one of them. While he was lying there he saw a spider weaving its

web across the opening of the cave. He lay and watched it spinning thread after thread and fixing each in its proper place, at exactly the right distance, till the mouth of the cave was covered with them. Presently he heard men's voices, and he gave himself up for lost, for he knew they were seeking him. They came to the mouth of the cave, and there they stopped. When they saw the opening covered with a spider's web, they said "No one has passed in here, or the web would be broken," and they went on to look elsewhere. Nola escaped, and when he spoke of it afterwards he used to say, "Where God is, a spider's web is as a wall; where He is not, a wall is but as a spider's web." In the text at the head of this sermon the trust of the wicked is said to be like a spider's web—they have nothing strong to depend on; but for those who love God even a spider's web can be a protection. Nothing is too humble for Him to use for His purposes, not even the tiny spider.

Now, if you come upon one spinning in a dark corner, or in a rose-bush, remember these two things—not to be vain and boastful about the gifts you possess, and not to think you are so tiny and insignificant that God can make no use of you. Let the spider teach you these two things, and I think it will be "lucky" for you that you have met him.

A LAUGHING-STOCK.

A laughing-stock to his neighbour.—Job xii. 4.

HANDS up those who like to be laughed at! Ah! I thought so! Not a hand to be seen. Hands up those who like to laugh at others! What! Still not a hand? Well I'm glad of that. It shows that even if you do laugh at others you are ashamed of it. For the last time, hands up those who can laugh at themselves! I hope there are lots of hands up this time, for a laugh at oneself is a very wholesome laugh indeed, and does one heaps of good.

1. Now there is no harm in laughing at people if you mean and do it in the right way. No one is the worse of a little good-humoured teasing. There is usually plenty of chaff between brothers and sisters, and also between schoolmates; and so long as it is good-humoured chaff it is both amusing and useful. It rubs off the corners, it is excellent practice in keeping one's temper, and it is death to humbug. It helps to make boys manly, and it prevents girls from putting on little airs. If you make fun in the right way it does good.

2. But the moment teasing means tears it is time to stop. And the moment teasing means badgering or bullying it is *more* than time to stop. The fun is all

gone, and only cruelty remains. There is a laugh that does good, but there is also a laugh that stings like a whip-lash. It makes sport of weakness, it makes fun of deformity, it mocks at holy things.

Have you ever heard of the laughing jackass? It is a bird that travellers in the Australian bush know well. It is an unimportant-looking bird of the king-fisher type, with a long beak; but the remarkable thing about it is its power of mimicking a human laugh. It can do it better than any parrot. It has an aggravating way, too, of appearing on the scene when anything goes wrong. Has the wagon broken down? Have the traces snapped? There, perched on the branch of a tree, is sure to be found a jackass convulsed with laughter. His "Ha! Ha! Ha!" and his "He! He! He!" mock and taunt the unfortunate traveller.

The jackass laughs because he is an ass and knows no better, but boys and girls or grown-up people who mock at trouble or sorrow or infirmity have no such excuse—unless of course they are content to rank with the jackass as asses.

Making a mock of others is the lowest form of amusement. It is not playing the game; for the person of whom a laughing-stock is made as a rule cannot help his peculiarity. Why jeer at a cripple? It is God's kindness that has made your limbs straight and supple. Why imitate a boy with a stammer? Thank God, rather, that He has enabled you to speak distinctly. Why scoff at a girl whose dress is shabby or whose accent is not so fine as yours? It is not her

fault. She is none the less a girl because of that, and the chances are that she is twice as much a woman as the girl who sneers at her. Shame on you for these things! Such mockery is beneath contempt.

It is told of a famous old clergyman of a northern town that, as he walked down the street, he saw a crowd gathered round something. He went up to the crowd and found that the something was one of his own church members helplessly drunk. The crowd was jeering and laughing at him, and one man in especial was loud in his sneers at such conduct on the part of a church member. The clergyman walked up to this man and with flashing eye said, "Sir, many walk of whom I have told you often, and now tell you —not *laughing*, Sir, *not laughing* but *weeping*, *weeping* —that they are the enemies of the Cross of Christ." The old clergyman was right. Tears, not laughter, should have greeted such a sight.

Boys and girls, the next time you are tempted to make a mock of anyone stop and think, "There, but for the grace of God, goes *myself*." That thought should take away all desire to hurt with ridicule another human being, especially if you try to imagine what it would be like to be in that other's place. How would you care to be made fun of? Would you enjoy it? Your heart tells you that you would hate it. Listen to your heart, then. It will not lead you wrong; for in its voice you have heard the voice of Christ pleading with you to be merciful and to spare one who is also one of God's children.

A DRIVEN LEAF.

A leaf driven to and fro.—Job xiii. 25 (AV).

If you take a country walk just now, or go down any road where there are trees, you will find my text. It may wear a crimson dress, or a brown one, or a gold, but it will be there sure enough along with many others of its kind.

Have you guessed the text, I wonder. It is "a leaf driven to and fro." You will find it in the Book of Job, but I'm not going to tell you the chapter or the verse because I want you to look for it.

I was watching some of those leaves the other day and they gave me a message to take to you. Would you like to know what they said?

1. Well, first they said, "Tell the boys and girls *to be glad.*"

They were such jolly little fellows and they seemed to have so very little to make them happy. I wondered if they never felt dull. But they answered, "Not in the least! We've had a gay old time all summer up in the sunshine and the breeze, and this is rather a bit of a come-down, but what's the use of fretting? There's a nice gust blowing, so we're off for a scamper."

And away they went rollicking and frolicking, dancing and prancing down the path.

And so the leaves driven to and fro say to you, "Be glad." If you cut your finger, or break your toy, cheer up! The world isn't coming to an end because of that. Keep a bright face when things go a bit wrong. That's the plucky thing to do. It isn't always the people with the fewest troubles who smile the most.

2. But next the leaves driven to and fro said to me, "Tell the boys and girls *to have a purpose.* Just look at us. We are at the mercy of every wind that blows. Sometimes we are scuttled away in one direction, then we are whisked away in another, and next minute we are whirled round and round in a circle. We have no stability of our own, and so we are influenced by the first breeze that comes along."

And they added, "We are just a picture of the people who have no purpose in life, the people who are easily led astray. They are very lovable often, but they have no high aim of their own, and so they just do exactly what those around them are doing. They are influenced by whatever wind is blowing. If it is a good wind they are good, but if it is a bad wind they are bad. So tell the boys and girls to have a purpose."

3. And lastly they said, "Tell the boys and girls that *God has a purpose for them.* God has a purpose for us if we will lie still and rest. He will make us into a warm blanket to cover the seeds and the plants from the winter cold. He will send the rain and the snow

and the worms to work on us and to turn us into food for the plants; and we shall be built up into some beautiful flower, or some fresh green leaf next summer.

"And God has work for the boys and girls too if they will lie still and rest. If they will come to rest in Jesus, if they will make up their minds to be His disciples and let Him do with them as He will, then He has a glorious work for them to do. He can use even them to make the world a better and a happier place, to make His kingdom of love come on earth."

A PRISONER IN THE STOCKS.

Thou puttest my feet also in the stocks.—Job xiii. 27.

If you had lived a hundred years ago you would have been better able to appreciate this text. The punishment of the stocks has quite gone out of fashion, but if you had lived then you might often have seen a man sitting on a bench on the village green with his ankles and perhaps his wrists thrust through a wooden board in front of him. And possibly a crowd of little village boys would be standing round jeering at him.

If you had asked anybody why that man was sitting there, they would have told you that he had been found guilty of some small offence—such as trespassing or disturbing the peace—and that he had been put in the stocks for a few hours as a punishment. Away in the New England States they even put people in the stocks for Sabbath-breaking. I fancy they would require a large supply of stocks nowadays if that law still held good!

Now I don't think the stocks could have been at all a comfortable form of punishment. I think you and I would have much preferred being put into prison for a day and being kept on bread and water. There you were set, with the boards firmly fixed down

on your ankles and wrists, and there you were obliged to sit for hours with your arms and legs held in one position until it pleased the powers that were to let you out. You must have felt very stiff and sore before you were released.

In our text Job says that God has put his feet in the stocks. What does he mean by that? Well, I think he just means that God has hedged him in on every side, that God has fixed him down in a certain position and that he can't move out of it. He can't alter his life, he can't alter his circumstances. He must just submit to God's way for him.

Now don't you think we are often placed very much as Job was? Our feet are put in the stocks.

At home we are often prevented from doing the things we want to do, and we don't at all like it. We want to go out on a certain day, and we have a bit of a cold and the rain is pouring in torrents, and mother says, "No, you must stay at home," and we feel very cross. Or we are reading a book that we know we ought not to be reading, and father comes and takes it from us, and we are very angry. Or mother forbids us to make friends with certain boys and girls, and we feel very annoyed. Father and mother put our feet in the stocks.

At school it is just the same. We have to conform to certain rules, we have to prepare our lessons—unless we wish to be left hopelessly behind—and sometimes it is all very irritating. The schoolmaster puts our feet in the stocks.

And often the same thing holds good in life. We want to go out into the big world and fight our way, we want to do grand things and exciting things, and we are compelled to stay at home. We have brains; we want to go to the university or enter a profession, and we have to help father in his workshop to make money to buy bread and butter for the younger ones. We are clever, or artistic, or musical, and mother needs us at home to sweep and dust and wash the dishes. Or perhaps we are just fixed where we are by poverty, or ill-health, or a sick relative. God is putting our feet in the stocks. It is very hard to bear, and we are inclined to rebel.

Now if your feet are in the stocks (and I think everybody's are in one way or another), will you try to remember this? When we are restricted like that it is always for one of two reasons, and both of them are good.

1. Sometimes our feet are put in the stocks *to keep us out of danger.*

When the present King of Spain was six years old he had a birthday, just like every little boy or girl; but as he was an only child and a very important person besides, he received a great many presents. Among the presents were dozens and dozens of boxes of beautiful sweets. Everybody seemed to be trying to outvie everybody else in the grandeur of those confections.

When the king saw them he wanted them all at

once. His mother said, "No," but she gave in to him so far. He was allowed to have one sweet out of each box. The rest were put past to be given away. The king began his feast, but before he had got half round the boxes he turned very sick and ill. For days he lay between life and death, and it was only the good nursing he received that brought him round again.

The colouring matter that made some of the sweets look so gay and pretty was slightly poisonous. If the Queen Mother had been wiser and had restricted her son to half a dozen sweets, all might have been well, but in the mistaken kindness of her heart she had allowed him a large number, and the result was nearly fatal.

Now when father and mother forbid you to do things you want to do, when they take away dangerous books from you, or keep you from bad companions, they are really removing poisoned sweets out of your reach. Some day you will realize what they have done for you and will thank them, although just at present you may find their restraint very hard to bear.

And God is just like father and mother. When He puts our feet in the stocks it is always for our good. He often puts them there to keep us back from the things that would hurt us. We may not be able to see it now, but some day we shall know and understand, and we shall thank Him for His wisdom and loving-kindness.

A famous minister tells the story of a little boy who wanted to go out one afternoon. The rain was falling fast and his governess suggested that they should pray for the rain to stop, but the little fellow asked, "Do you suppose God wants it to rain?" "Yes," replied his governess. "Then," said the small boy, "I think it would be safer to let Him have His own way."

Yes, it is always safer to let God have His own way. He is far wiser than we are, and far more loving, and He will never send us anything that is not for our good.

2. Sometimes our feet are put in the stocks *to make us stronger and better and more useful.*

A South African minister tells us about a wonderful vine he saw growing out there. Never had he seen such a luxuriant vine. It spread far and wide and climbed over everything within its reach, *but*—it had no fruit. Do you know the reason? It had not been pruned. It had been allowed to grow just as it liked, and it had grown all to leaves and tendrils.

And when father and mother restrain us and restrict us, when God puts our feet in the stocks, it is often to make us better, and purer, and stronger.

Don't rebel then, boys and girls, when things don't go just as you want them. Take it sensibly, take it sweetly, and you will become strong, and brave, and pure.

A MOTH-EATEN GARMENT.

A garment that is moth-eaten.—Job xiii. 28.

I WANT you to take a good look at what I have brought you to-day. It is a cashmere shawl belonging to an old lady who is a friend of mine, and she very kindly lent it to me as a text for you.

If you looked at the shawl from a distance you might imagine it was very beautiful, but if you came a little closer you would see that it is all riddled with small holes, just as if a great many bullets had gone through it. I hope some of you can see the holes from where you are sitting.

Now I wonder who made these holes in the shawl? Well, my friend forgot to put any camphor in the drawer where she laid away her best shawl, and by and by along came Mrs. Moth looking for a nice, soft, warm place to lay her eggs. When she found the shawl she exclaimed, "Why, here's the very thing!" and she lost no time in setting to work.

Shortly after, out of each egg popped a little grub, and as he came out to the world he said to himself, "I'm really most awfully hungry. I must have something to eat." So he at once proceeded to eat the thing nearest to him, which happened to be his particular

corner of the shawl. And that is how the holes came in the cashmere.

Now I think that our characters are a little like this moth-eaten shawl. They were meant to be beautiful and useful, but some destructive moths have eaten into them and spoiled them. I wonder what the names of these moths are? I think they are bad habits, and unkind feelings, and wicked thoughts.

1. There are two ways in which these moths spoil our character—first they spoil its beauty, and second they spoil its usefulness.

(1) *They spoil its beauty.* If you came a little nearer you would see how the moths have spoiled the beauty of this shawl. It is made of a lovely, soft, fine wool and must have been very nice to look at once upon a time, but now nobody would wish to wear it as an ornament. It is altogether spoiled. And it is just like that with bad habits. They make ugly holes in our character. You often meet people who would have been very noble and grand and beautiful if they had not allowed a wicked temper, or an unkind feeling, or a bad habit to get the better of them.

(2) And besides spoiling the beauty of our character, these wicked little moths *spoil its usefulness.* A garment that is badly moth-eaten is of no use. It is quite rotten and tears when we pull it.

Now I think we should all like to be of use to somebody in the world, but if we let those wicked little moths eat into our nature I'm afraid we won't be able

to do much good. They will weaken our character until nobody will be able to rely on us.

2. Shall I give you two recipes to help to keep away the moths?

(1) First, *be busy.* You know it is when clothes are laid away idle that the moths come to them. I read a poem the other day about a lady who owned a very beautiful garment. It was so beautiful that she thought it was too fine to wear, so she laid it away carefully in a drawer. Guests came to the house but she received them in sober raiment. The poor and the orphaned came and she gave them pity, but she never cheered them with a sight of the beautiful garment. It lay wrapped up in a napkin in the dark drawer, its beauty all hidden. And then a feast-day came and she took out the garment meaning to wear it. But when she shook out its wonderful folds she found that the moths had been busy with it, and that its beauty and its usefulness were gone for ever. And the writer of the poem ends with these two lines—

> Into the folded robe alone
> The moth with its blighting steals.

One of the best ways of keeping good is to do good. If you are busy helping and serving others and making use of the talents God has given you, why then, you have very little time to harbour wicked thoughts or grow bad habits. The boys and girls that Satan loves to get hold of are those who have no aim in life and

too much time on their hands. He usually finds them an easy prey. So the first recipe is—"Be busy."

(2) And the second is—"*Use plenty of camphor.*" If you keep plenty of camphor among your garments the moths will be afraid to come near them. And what camphor shall we use to keep the moths of bad habits away from our characters? The camphor of prayer. God will never refuse to help us if we ask Him, and when we have this remedy at hand we should all use it.

3. But I'm afraid that in spite of all our efforts there will still be a few moth-holes in the garments of our characters, for all of us began to let the moths have their way before we could even walk or talk. What are we to do then? Are we to go through life with our beauty and our usefulness always a bit spoilt? Sometimes when you have made a big tear in your coat or your frock, mother darns the rent so carefully that you can scarcely see it, but even mother isn't clever enough to get rid of the holes in the moth-eaten garment.

But Jesus can mend the holes in the moth-eaten garments of our characters. He, and He alone, can do it because He alone has lived the perfect life, and He has suffered and died to make us good. He can take away all the ugliness out of our lives and put our mistakes right, and He can present us at last faultless before His Father's throne with exceeding joy.

REMOVING ROCKS.

Shall the rock be removed out of its place?—Job xviii. 4.

At first sight the answer to this question seems to be "No." A rock is such a great strong thing; how can we move it out of its place?

Those of you who have built castles on the seashore know that sometimes your spade strikes on something that looks like a big stone. Perhaps it *is* just a big stone. You dig round about it till you have loosened it, and then, with a strong heave, out it comes. But sometimes the farther you dig the bigger the stone grows, and at last you come to the conclusion that it isn't a stone at all but a rock firmly rooted in the ground. So you give up trying to move it out of its place. You alter the shape of your castle to suit the rock, or you build it in another place. And if anyone asked you then, "Shall the rock be removed out of its place?" you would answer, "No, we have to move out of *our* place to suit the rock."

But there is another answer to that question, "Shall the rock be removed out of its place?" "Yes." "How?"

Well sometimes a big earthquake moves rocks out of their place and flings them about as if they were

pebbles, but that is not a very usual way. And sometimes men blast away huge boulders with gunpowder, but that is an artificial way. There is yet another way in which rocks are removed out of their place—a very quiet and gentle way, but the most common way of all. It is the way of Jack Frost and Mother Rain.

The rain falls on the rocks, and it carries with it certain acids that eat into them and very, very slowly destroy them. Then Jack Frost comes along and finds the moisture in the crevices. Now he is rather an important fellow and requires a lot of room for himself, so when he freezes up the moisture he pushes and pushes to get elbow-room. This goes on year after year while the cracks in the rock grow wider and longer. At last a big boulder can hold on no longer. One day, after a severe frost, the thaw comes. There is a roar and a crash and the big boulder lies in pieces at the bottom of the cliff. The rock has been removed out of its place.

Now sometimes God puts rocks in our way through life to try what kind of men and women, what kind of boys and girls we are. These rocks are difficulties and hardships, and the way in which we meet them determines the kind of people we are.

Some people sit down in front of their rocks and never try to get past them at all. They moan that the rocks are far too strong for them and that they couldn't ever *possibly* move them out of their place, so what would be the use of trying. These are the cowardly people.

And some people walk right round their rocks so as to avoid them altogether. They leave others to struggle with them while they choose an easier way. And so they never grow any wiser or stronger, for the rocks were put there to make noble men and women of them. These are the lazy and selfish people.

But there are others who, like the frost and the rain, keep pegging away at their rocks. Bit by bit they get the better of them until they have entirely disappeared. Yet the strength and the firmness of them have entered into the character of those who have conquered them. These are the brave and patient people.

Now you have all got rocks in your way, great or small. I don't know what they are, but you know. Perhaps your special rock is a difficult lesson, perhaps it is a bad temper, perhaps it is a bit of hard work. That does not make much difference. The big question is, "Shall the rock be removed out of its place?" "Yes or no?" And the way in which you answer that question will show what kind of boy or girl you are going to be.

THE TOPAZ.

The topaz of Ethiopia shall not equal it.—Job xxviii. 19.

NOVEMBER is often a dull gloomy month, but it brings us a cheerful sunny stone—the topaz. The topaz got its name in a curious way. "Topaz" comes from a Greek word meaning "to seek." The stone was first found in a certain island in the Red Sea which was often surrounded by fog. And because the sailors had to seek long for the island ere they found it, they called the gem "topaz."

How many of you know a topaz? Well, as there are three different stones called "topaz" you will be excused if you don't recognize one when you meet it. The true topaz is a stone which comes to us chiefly from Brazil, and it is usually golden or yellow or honey-coloured. But it is found also without any colour at all, clear and limpid, and then it is so like the diamond that it is very difficult for ordinary people to tell the difference. These colourless topazes have been nicknamed "slave's diamonds," but there is a prettier name than that for them. Brazilians call them "*pingas d'agoa*," and the French "*gouttes d'eau*," both names meaning "drops of water."

The second stone known as "topaz" is our old friend

the corundum, only it is yellow corundum, not red corundum like the ruby, or blue corundum like the sapphire. This yellow corundum is called the *Oriental* topaz.

The third stone known as "topaz" is one we are all very familiar with, for it is nothing more or less than the stone which is set in kilt brooches and other Highland jewellery—the cairngorm or Scotch topaz. I expect a good many of the girls here will have a piece of jewellery set with a Scotch topaz, and if any of the boys have a plaid to their kilt they will be very proud of the cairngorm which fastens it on the shoulder.

Now, to return to the first or real topaz. There are several remarkable things about it. To begin with, it is three and a half times heavier than water. Then if you heat it, or rub it, it becomes electric like amber. If you heat it slowly to a red heat (having first packed it in lime magnesia or asbestos) and cool it equally slowly, you will find that your yellow topaz has turned pink. That is how pink topazes are made, for the natural stone is never that shade. Then though the topaz is a hard stone, which cuts and polishes beautifully, strange to say it is very brittle, and if you let it fall you may pick it up in two.

The topaz was supposed in olden times to bring its wearer beauty, wisdom, and long life. It was also believed to quench thirst. Perhaps that was because the colourless topazes are so like drops of pure water.

There is a story of a thirst-quenching Indian topaz whose owner was a Hindu magician or necromancer.

One of the Indian Rajahs or princes, who was fighting a neighbouring prince, asked the magician to help him to win a battle. The battle took place, but alas! the magician's help was vain, for the Rajah was beaten and the necromancer himself wounded to death. As he lay dying on the battlefield he heard near him the groans of a poor wounded soldier who was crying out for a drop of water to quench his burning thirst. With a last effort of strength the necromancer threw his precious jewel to the soldier, telling him to lay it on his heart. No sooner had the man done so than his thirst vanished and his wound healed.

Well, that is only a tale. But I have told it you because I think its message and that of the topaz are one—"Be sympathetic." What is sympathy? The dictionary tells us that it is "feeling with" others. There used to be an old conundrum—I expect it is still alive—"Why is sympathy like blind man's buff?" "Because it's a fellow feeling for a fellow creature." Now I want to ask you, "Why is sympathy like a topaz?" And I shall give you three reasons.

1. *It is cheering.*— The topaz is a cheerful stone. Did you ever notice that yellow is a cheerful colour? It is. It "makes a sunshine in a shady place." If you have a yellow paper on a dull north room, that room will look as if the sun were streaming into it. So sympathy warms and cheers.

2. *It is electric.*—It is something that goes out from you to someone else, or comes from someone else to you. You can't catch hold of it and say, "This is sympathy,"

but it is like a wave of electricity, you feel it. It makes you tingle with pleasure. It attracts you like a magnet.

3. *It is fragile.*—It is a delicate sort of thing. You can't bounce in on somebody and blurt out, "Now I'm going to be sympathetic. I'm going to say so-and-so and I'm going to do so-and-so." You must go about it in a more delicate way than that. Often sympathy can't be put into words. A look or a touch is enough.

A famous preacher tells that when he was a boy there lived in the next house a man who was a hopeless drunkard. The boy's father was very anxious that the man should be cured and he tried all in his power to help him. But the poor man found it impossible to resist turning into a public-house when he passed its open doors, and saw its flaring lights, and smelt its smell of whisky. At last, after trying and failing again and again, he said to the boy's father, "I think if I could hold someone's hand I might manage it." The little chap heard this and was keen to help, so he offered himself for the job. Day after day he went and slipped his hand into that of the man and guided him safely past the danger spots. He didn't say anything. All he did was just to give a friendly grip; but it was the finest kind of sympathy, and it worked the man's cure.

Now a word of warning! Don't keep your sympathy for people who are sad or in trouble. Spare some of it for those who are specially happy or joyful. The Bible says, "Rejoice with them that rejoice; weep with them

that weep." And you will notice that it puts the "rejoicing with them that rejoice" before the "weeping with them that weep." Perhaps that is because most people find it easier to be sorry for others' woes than to be glad at others' joys. I don't know why that should be, unless it is that there's a little bit of jealousy at the bottom of our hearts, and that little bit of jealousy comes up to the top when we hear of anyone who has had any special good fortune.

Boys and girls, if you are ever bothered with that mean little feeling give it no mercy, kill it right away. Do the sympathetic thing and the fine thing. Rejoice in your friend's joy. Here's the message of the topaz in other words, "Halve your friends' sorrows, and double their joys."

SEALS.

Clay under the seal.—Job xxxviii. 14.

HAVE you ever played at making seals? It is a fascinating game. All you require is a lighted candle, a stick of sealing-wax, a piece of paper, and the loan of a die or a signet ring from father or mother. Hold the sealing-wax in the candle-flame until it is soft enough to drop on the paper. When you have dropped the spot of wax take your die or signet and stamp it quickly, evenly, and firmly in the hot wax. Keep it there for a minute, then raise it gently, and you will find that the motto or crest or initials on your die will be imprinted on the wax. You may not make a very neat job the first time you try it, or even the third time, or the thirtieth—the wax may look black and smoked, the impression may be faint at one part, or the drop of wax may not have been the right shape, and a piece of the seal may be awanting. It is all a case of practice, and practice makes perfection. Go on trying if mother does not object to your using a lighted candle, and father does not grudge the wax.

If they do, I'll tell you of an easier, cheaper, and safer way to make seals; it requires neither wax nor candle nor paper—only the die or signet and your own

willing hand. Press the die for a short time on the back of your hand. When you raise it you will find the device stamped perfectly on your flesh. Of course it will fade in a few minutes, but, since it costs nothing, you can do it over and over again, till you grow tired of the game.

Most of the seals we are accustomed to see are made of wax, but seals have been and still are made of other materials—of metal, for instance. In the Middle Ages the Popes used to attach leaden seals called *bullae* (from the Latin word *bulla* meaning a circular ornament) to their decrees, and that is how we read in history books of Papal "bulls."

Sometimes, but rarely, the seals were made of gold. When a Pope wanted to confer a title on a monarch he sealed the document with a golden seal. When one of the Popes gave King Henry the Eighth the title of "Defender of the Faith," he sealed the paper with a golden seal; and you can see that very seal to-day if you look for it in the British Museum.

But the kind of seal of which our text speaks is much older than that given to Henry the Eighth. It is a seal made of neither metal nor wax, for the material on which it is stamped is clay. It was the kind of seal used by the Babylonians and Assyrians thousands of years ago. They took the moist clay and they stamped it with the die, and then they baked it hard in the oven or in the sun. There still exist some of these ancient clay seals with the marks where the string or strip of leather was fastened to them. And you may

see too the very dies or stamps, or *matrices*, as they are called, which made the impression. These early dies were not shaped like ours; they were often round like a roller, and as they rolled over the soft clay they left a figured impression behind.

Boys and girls, I think we are rather like that piece of clay. When we come into the world we are like the smooth soft mass without any marks on it, but as life rolls on it leaves, as the roller leaves on the clay, a lasting impression on us. But though we may be like the clay in some ways we are unlike it in this—that we can choose the kind of impression or pattern that will be stamped on us. We can say whether it will be a good and beautiful impression that we shall bear, or whether it will be one both distorted and ugly. It all depends on who holds the die. If we go to Christ and say to Him, "Here is my life all before me, help me to make it good and beautiful; help me to make the very best of it; help me to stamp it truly and well"—if we say that to Christ, He will take the die into His own hand, and He will stamp our life for us.

And what do you think the impression will be? Why, it will be just a portrait of Himself. In olden days kings had on their royal seals their own portraits, and when they stamped anything with the royal seal everyone knew it belonged to the king for they saw his image there. So with Christ's seal. Others looking on us and seeing the impression on our clay will say, "They too belong to Christ."

THE TREASURES OF THE SNOW.

Hast thou entered the treasuries of the snow?—Job xxxviii. 22.

TO-DAY I want you to come with me into a wonderful treasure-house and we shall walk round and look at the treasures. It is the treasure-house of the snow. Perhaps you never thought very much about the treasures of the snow. You may have thought more of its pleasures, of the snow-balls and snow men you could make, and the sledge rides you could take. But its treasures are well worth looking at too.

1. The first treasure we shall look at is its *beauty.*

You go to sleep one night in a bleak, dingy world and you wake up next morning to find that the earth has put on its beautiful white winter dress. Last night the brown earth lay cold and bare, a few dead flowers drooped their withered heads, and the tall trees shivered as they waved their leafless arms. But to-day all is transformed:—

The snow had begun in the gloaming,
And busily all the night
Had been heaping field and highway
With a silence deep and white.

Every pine and fir and hemlock
Wore ermine too dear for an earl,

And the poorest twig on the elm-tree
Was ridged inch deep with pearl.[1]

And not only are the earth and trees and flowers changed, but the ugly walls and houses which man has built have got their share of the beautiful white dress.

Then have you ever tried to look at a snowflake through a microscope? If you have you will have seen something very wonderful and beautiful, for each snowflake is made up of numbers of little crystals that take the form of six-pointed stars. Sometimes, when the flakes are very tiny, each one is a single star, but more frequently the little stars join together to make a flake. Nor are these crystals all alike. More than a thousand different varieties have been noticed. Some are quite plain like the spokes of a wheel, but in others the rays of the star are formed of the finest lacework. Each little snow crystal is like a perfect little flower which God has sent down from His sky-garden.

Now I wonder if you ever thought about the trouble God takes to make things beautiful. He need not have made the snowflakes so lovely. It would have been enough if He had made them useful. But He could not make them otherwise, just because He is God, and God is love; He could not have made them otherwise, because He wanted to give us joy. Everything that God makes is beautiful. He made the flowers, and the trees, and the grass, the moon and the stars, the blue sea, and the everlasting hills. It is

[1] J. Russell Lowell, *The First Snowfall.*

man who spoils things and makes them ugly. He digs up the beautiful green fields and plants ugly towns on them, or runs railways through the middle of them, or covers them with heaps of coal refuse.

God meant our souls to be beautiful too, but we have allowed sin to spoil them. Yet they can still be made beautiful if we will give them back into His keeping to mould them.

2. The next treasure I want you to look at is the *warmth* of the snow.

Perhaps you think it is a funny thing to call the snow warm. You could have understood if I had called it cold, because you know how your fingers tingle when you try to make snow-balls. Nevertheless the snow forms a warm blanket for the earth. In the Psalms there is a verse that says, "He giveth snow like wool." And snow is just like wool because it prevents heat from escaping. When it falls on the earth it helps to keep in the heat that the earth has absorbed during the summer-time.

Scientists who have made experiments have found out that under two feet of snow the temperature is forty degrees warmer than above it, and in cold climates farmers depend on the snow to keep the hard frosts off their sown crops. Underneath the snow beautiful flowers have been found growing that would have perished in much milder climates if exposed to the air, and up in the Alps some of the loveliest flowers grow on the edge of the snow-fields.

Little snowflakes falling lightly,
Little snowflakes falling whitely,
Cover up the sleeping flowers,
Keep them warm through winter hours.
Do you know
Why the snow
Is hurrying through the garden so?
Just to spread
A nice soft bed
For the sleepy flowers' head,
To cuddle up the baby ferns, and smooth the lily's sheet,
And tuck a warm white blanket down around the roses' feet.

I wonder what the flowers think when the snow comes on the top of them? Perhaps they think it is very hard to be shut away from the light. But if the snow didn't come they would never blossom next spring. And I think it is just like that with the hard things we have to endure. It is the difficulties we overcome and the hardships we bear that make the sweetest and fairest flowers blossom in our characters.

3. Another of the treasures of the snow is its *power*.

If you watch it coming down so gently and softly you may think it is one of the weak things of the world, and if you weigh a snowflake on a pair of scales it will not even make the scales tremble. Yet a snowstorm can stop trains, block roads, break telegraph wires, interrupt labour. And up in the mountains avalanches of snow can destroy villages, tear great rocks from their foundations, change the face of a mountain-side.

Now sometimes we are tempted to think we can't

be of very much use and can't do very much good in the world. We are so weak and small, and the world is such a very big place, and we are tempted to give up trying. But remember it is each little snowflake doing its own part that makes for strength, each one falling in its own place without ceasing. And if the tiny snowflakes that weigh next to nothing can be so powerful, surely we can be of very great value if we put our weight on the right side.

4. One more treasure I want you to look at. It is. the *purity* of the snow.

Newly fallen snow is the whitest thing in the world. If you take out your handkerchief on a snowy day you know how grey and grimy it looks. But when the snow falls on a city street it does not stay white long. Soon it gets covered with soot, or mixed with mud and turned into slush, and then we get rid of it as quickly as we can by carting it away.

Now you remember we noticed that sin spoiled our beauty. Well, there is another thing it does—it soils our whiteness. We are not long in the world before it begins to lay its ugly marks upon us. And those marks will never come off unless we ask God to wash them clean.

God can melt the dirty snow in our city streets. He can lift it up into the clouds and turn it again into beautiful white snow. And He can lift us up too and wash away all our stains and make us "whiter than snow."

WHO SENDS THE RAIN?

Hath the rain a father?—Job xxxviii. 28.

THE words of the text sound as if they were a bit out of a fairy tale. Where but in a fairy tale does one hear of such a thing as the rain having a father? You say to yourselves that if every verse in this wonderful Book of Job were like this one you would read it straight through without stopping.

As most of you know, the Book of Job was written by an Oriental—that is a person belonging to a country far away to the east—and eastern people have ways of thinking very different from ours. Even the ancient Greeks, who were not Orientals, had a way of putting everything under charge of some god. The air, the winds, and the waters were peopled with spiritual beings, and everything in the natural world was under their control. Iris was the goddess who brought the beautiful rainbow out of the dark clouds and formed with it a bridge between earth and heaven. Aurora was the goddess by whose power the dawn crimsoned the east and ushered in each new day.

Your text is an example of the same thing. Instead of asking, "Who made the rain?" the writer has put down, "Hath the rain a father?"

Little boys and girls are like these people in a certain way. Before they go to school for the first time, they think of nearly everything about them as being alive. The wind is something that is very strong and is often cruel. The moon is a face that keeps laughing all the time. The huge guardian trees of the wood are hoary old men, older than any grandfather. Jack Frost is a funny little man who on cold mornings draws lovely pictures on the windows.

But school soon drives away all those ideas. There you learn things about nature. You are very soon able to say, "I know where the rain comes from. It comes from the clouds, and the clouds come from the sea; it is the sun that raises the vapours from the sea to form the clouds, and these clouds are driven by the winds and attracted by the mountains, and so reach places where they are to send down showers upon the ground. It is all very true, and as I said interesting also; but the more you study the more you want to put the question, "Who superintends everything? Who really does send the rain?"

Not that you like it! We in this dim and cloudy country have rather a prejudice against rain. Once a boy had been promised a visit to a farm. He could hardly sleep for joy the night before the promised visit. He thought of all he would see there. There was the stable, and the big horse on which he would get a ride. There were hens and ducks. There was the ploughman who might take him a drive in his cart, and allow him

to hold the reins. But when the morning came, the rain was lashing on the windows. Even before he got up he knew that there was no chance of going to the farm that day, so he cried, and complained that his holiday had been spoilt by the nasty rain. But at the very farm which the little fellow was to visit, his uncle, when he rose and saw the rain falling, rubbed his hands, and was as jolly as his young nephew had been the evening before. His land wanted rain, and if it had delayed coming what was growing in the fields would have been ruined.

Even when the rain cheats you of a trip to the country don't forget that it may be a great blessing to the farmer. A traveller with his guide was on one occasion passing over the range of Carmel when rain began to fall in torrents. The guide threw a large Arab cloak over the traveller, saying, "May God preserve you, while He is blessing the fields."

There is a great English writer who speaks of the cloud that brings the rain as "The Angel of the Sea." That is a beautiful thought; but this verse gives us one that is even finer. It is that the God who sends the soft gentle rain, as well as the great dashing rains, is your Father and mine. He takes care of us, and will never really let anything hurt us. His plan for all of us must in the end be kind, for He is too wise to make mistakes and too loving to do anything that is against the real good of His creatures.

Soft comes the April rain to bud and flower
And tender grass:—the shrinking violet
Unharmed receives the gently falling shower,
And scarce her petals by its gift are wet:
The blue-bell, peeping from the trellised bower,
Holds up her tiny goblet to the sky,
Till on its rim a dainty pearl is set,
Such as the Indies cannot give nor buy:—
Hid in the fragrant blossom sits the bee,
Secure; the oriole forgets his melody,
And trails his scarlet wings, his ebon bill
Uplifting gratefully; and as I look, the hill
Is bathed in sunlight; ceased the gentle rain,
And bird and bee take up their song again.[1]

[1] Robert F. Roden, in *A Garland of Verse*, 158.

POINTERS.

The Bear with her train.—Job xxxviii. 32.

We all know a pointer when we see it, don't we? It is a long slender piece of wood which our teachers use to show us places on the map, or point out words or figures on the blackboard. Yes, but the school pointer is only one kind of pointer, and any of you who think a moment will be able to tell me of many more. There are, for instance, the sign-posts at the cross-roads with their long outstretched arms pointing to the different roads; there is the pointed hand with the sticking-out first finger which shows the way to any special place or object; there is the weathercock on the steeple which points in the direction from which the wind blows; there are the hands of the clock which point to the hours and the minutes; and last, but not least, there is the magnetic needle of the compass which always points to the north.

Well, the pointers of which we are going to speak this morning are older than any of these pointers. The chances are that they are older than the world itself. For thousands, perhaps millions, of years they have pointed steadily to the same object, and for thousands of years to come they will point to it still.

They are such important pointers that they each have a name. These names sound rather queer, but here they are, and this is how you spell them! D-u-b-h-e, Dubhe; and M-e-r-a-k, Merak. Have you guessed them yet? Though you may not know them by their names you know them well by sight. You must have noticed them many times shining up in the sky, for they are the two stars in the blade of the "Plough" which always point to the Pole Star. They are the compass of the sky.

You know what the "Plough" is like. It is a cluster of seven stars. Three of them form the handle of the plough, and four form the blade. The two which form the front part of the blade farthest away from the handle are our friends with the strange names.

Now the "Plough" is part of a constellation or cluster of stars known as the "Great Bear." The three handle stars are the Bear's tail, and the four blade stars are part of the Bear's body. You may have seen pictures of the various groups of stars showing the people and animals they were supposed to resemble. From these they received their names. As far as we know it was the Chaldeans, five thousand years ago, who first named and studied the stars. At any rate by the time of Job this particular cluster was known as the "Bear," and when our text speaks of God guiding "the Bear with her train" it just means that God guides the stars that form that constellation—the train being the tail stars.

Different nations have given the "Great Bear" different names, according to the pictures they fancied

it formed. The Greeks called it "a chariot"; and the ancient Gauls named it "Arthur's Chariot"; whilst our own forefathers spoke of it as the "Churl's Wain" —that is to say, the peasant's waggon, now corrupted into "Charles' Wain." The Americans call it the "Dipper," because they think that the part we know as the "Plough" is shaped like a ladle—and so it is.

But the "Great Bear" is not the only bear. There is a "Little Bear" as well; and the bright star in the very tip of the "Little Bear's" tail is to the sailor or the traveller the most important star in all the sky, for it shines always in the north, and from it they can find their way. Indeed, before the compass was invented the stars were all that men had to guide them. By studying the map of the sky they found their way on the map of the world.

We have got rather far away from our friends Dubhe and Merak, but now we are coming back to them. The marvellous thing about them is that though the "Great Bear" changes its place and circles round the Pole Star, these pointers, no matter where they may be, always point straight to the Pole Star. Other stars and other constellations may come and go, but if the sky is clear and the stars are shining, there you will see the North Star and its faithful pointers.

Now, I wonder how you would like to be a pointer star? It sounds a far-away sort of business, doesn't it? and a cold one too on a frosty winter night! But there is no need for you to climb up into the sky in order to be a pointer. You can be a pointer here on

earth; and you can point to a star more splendid than any that ever shone in the heavens. You can point to the Star of all the worlds, Christ Himself.

You remember that when Christ came a beautiful star appeared and stood over the inn at Bethlehem; but the Baby that lay in the manger was greater than the star that shone over Him. He was the Star of stars, the Star that was to bring peace and hope and love into this dark world. And we older people and you boys and girls can be pointers to that Star. With God's help we can always keep true and faithful to Christ. We can live and love and work and pray, so that looking at us the world will say, "There is one who points us to Christ."

SEEING THE KING.

I had heard of thee by the hearing of the ear;
But now mine eye seeth thee.—Job xlii. 5.

ONCE upon a time there lived in a far-away land a poor man who had one little son. The boy's mother was dead, and as he had no brothers or sisters to play with he was often very lonely.

Not very far from where the boy lived was the palace of the great King. But although his sovereign lived so near the boy had never seen him; for this King had the power to make himself invisible, and it was only those whose eyes had been touched with a certain eye-salve who could behold him.

Now the boy's father worked for the King and he went twice every day to the palace. In the morning he went to get orders for the day's work. In the evening he gave an account of all that he had done, and received the royal pardon for the mistakes he had made.

The boy always looked forward to the hour when his father came home at night. For then the man took him on his knee and told him stories about the King, and of how great, and wise, and kind, and good he was. And he told him, too, about the beautiful palace and how

some day, when his work was done, he was going to live there with the King always, and never be hungry, or cold, or tired any more.

Sometimes the boy asked why his father worked for the King, and the father always answered, "Because I love him and he loves me and has done so much for me. Although I am only a poor man he calls me his friend, and it is always the King's friends who work for him. First they are his friends and then they are his servants—not because they have to be, but because they want to be." The boy used often to puzzle over that answer, but his father always said, "Some day you will understand."

Now the more his father talkéd about the King, the more the boy wished to see him. It was all very well hearing about him, but how much better it would be to see him for himself! But his clothes were very old and shabby and he was afraid to enter the royal presence in rags.

One night his father had been talking to him as usual and at last he could contain himself no longer. "Oh, Father," he said, "I *wish* I could see the King." And his father replied, "Then you *shall* see him." The boy could scarcely believe his ears. "May I really and truly go and see him?" he asked. "Are you sure he would really wish to see me?" "Why, of course," replied the father, "do you not know that the King has issued an invitation for anybody to come to him who wants to come?" "Then why doesn't everybody go?" asked the boy. "Ah," said his father, "that

is because some people are so foolish as not to *want* to go."

The boy felt very happy that at last he was really and truly going to see the King, but suddenly he remembered his shabby clothes. "Oh, Father," he said, "I can't go in these rags and I have no money to buy new ones. I'm afraid I can't see the King after all." But his father answered, "Don't you know that he would rather have you come just as you are?" "And when shall we start?" asked the boy. "May we go to-morrow morning?" But his father replied, "No, we shall start to-night. It is never too soon to go to the King."

So they set out for the palace in the darkness and at last they reached the gates. The father gave the password to the sentry and immediately the gates were opened and they found themselves in a large courtyard. Crossing this they reached the palace and the father led his son through some corridors till they came to the King's presence chamber. The door was shut, but the man knocked and immediately a kind voice said, "Come in." They entered at once and the little boy felt very excited and rather shy.

But when he got inside he was much astonished. The room was beautiful, far more beautiful than he had ever imagined, but to all appearance it was empty. At one end stood the throne, but apparently it was vacant. Then he remembered the eye-salve, and just at that moment his father spoke. "I have brought thee mine only son, oh gracious King. He desired to

see thee and to know thee." And the kind voice replied, oh, so gently, "Welcome, little boy, I have been waiting for you, and I am glad you have come so soon. They call me 'the Friend of little children.' Would you like me to be your friend?"

And the little boy fell on his knees before the throne and said, "Indeed, oh great King, it is too much to ask, but if thou wilt be my friend, then I shall be thy servant all my days, even as my father is." Then the King replied, "Little boy I *am* your friend. Put your hand in mine."

So the boy put out his hand although he could not see the King and immediately he felt it grasped by a hand that was kind and strong. Then his eyes were touched and something that was darkening their vision fell away, and he saw the King in his beauty.

The boy bowed his face to the ground but the King lifted him up. He set him on his knee, and put his kind arms round him. And he told him how much he had loved him and longed for him to come to him, and how, now that he had once found his way, he must return very often until the day arrived when he should come to live with him for ever. Then he set him down very gently and bade him "Good night," and the father and son set out on their homeward way.

But the presence of the King seemed to go with them, and all the way something was singing in the boy's heart. And at last he said, "Oh, Father, you didn't tell me half of how good and great and loving he was. It is far, far better to know the King than

just to hear about him. And now he is going to be my friend too!"

Boys and girls, there is a great King who wants to be your Friend. You have heard about Him often from your father and mother, from your minister or your teacher. But there is something far better than hearing about Him and that is seeing Him and knowing Him for yourself. There is no comparison between the two.

Do you know Him like that? It is never too soon to begin to know the Friend of little children and He invites everybody to come to Him. How can you make Him your Friend? Just by putting your hand in His. Then He will anoint your eyes with the eye-salve of faith and love, and you will see Him in His beauty. And He will lead you safely through life's joys and sorrows and temptations till at last He brings you to dwell with Him for ever where you will behold Him face to face.

UNIVERSAL
LIBRARY

136 600

UNIVERSAL
LIBRARY